Wych Hazel.

BY THE AUTHORS OF

"The Wide Wide World."

"Dollars and Cents."

ETC.

WYCH HAZEL

BY

SUSAN AND ANNA WARNER

AUTHORS OF 'WIDE, WIDE WORLD,' 'QUEECHY,' ETC., AND OF 'DOLLARS AND CENTS,' 'MELODY OF THE 23rd PSALM,' ETC., ETC.

"Brown as a nut, and sweeter than the kernel."—SHAKESPEARE.

NEW YORK:

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS.

182 FIFTH AVENUE.

1876.

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CHAPTER I.

Mr. Falkirk.

"We may shut our eyes, but we cannot help knowing
That skies are clear and grass is growing."

WHEN one has in charge a treasure which one values greatly, and which, if once made known one is pretty sure to lose, I suppose the impulse of most men would be towards a hiding-place. So, at any rate, felt one of the men in this history. Schools had done their secluding work for a time; tutors and governors had come and gone under an almost Carthusian vow of silence, except as to their lessons; and now with seventeen years of inexperience on his hands, Mr. Falkirk's sensations were those of the man out West, who wanted to move off whenever another man came within twenty miles of him.

Thus, in the forlorn hope of a retreat which yet he knew must prove useless, Mr. Falkirk let the first March winds blow him out of town; and at this present time was snugly hid away in a remote village which nobody ever heard of, and where nobody ever came.

So far so good: Mr. Falkirk rested and took breath. Nevertheless the spring came, even there; and following close in her train, the irrepressible conflict. Whoever succeeded in running away from his duties—or his difficulties? There was a flutter of young life within doors as without, and Mr. Falkirk knew it: there were

a hundred rills of music, a thousand nameless flowers to which he could not close his senses. There was a soft, indefinable stir and sweetness, that told of the breaking of Winter bonds and the coming of Summer glories ; and he could not stay the progress of things in the one case more than in the other.

Mr. Falkirk had always taken care of this girl—the few years before his guardianship were too dim to look back to much. From the day when she, a suddenly orphaned child, stood frightened and alone among strangers, and he came in and took her on his knee, and bade her "be a woman, and be brave." That was his ideal of womanhood, — to that combination of strength and weakness he had tried to bring Wych Hazel.

Yet though she had grown up in Mr. Falkirk's company, she never thoroughly understood him: nature and circumstances had made him a reserved man,—and her eyes were young. Of a piece with his reserve was the peculiar fence of separation which he built up between all his own concerns and those of his ward. He was poor—she had a more than ample fortune ; yet no persuading could make him live with her. Had he been rich, perhaps she might have lived with him ; but as it was, unless when lodgings were the rule, they lived in separate houses ; only his was always close at hand. Even when his ward was a little child, living at Chickaree with her nurses and housekeeper, Mr. Falkirk never spent a night in the house. He formally bought and paid for a tiny cottage on the premises, and there he lived: nothing done without his knowledge, nothing undone without his notice. Not a creature came or went unperceived by Mr. Falkirk. And yet this super

vision was generally pleasant. As he wrought, nothing had the air of espionage—merely of care; and so I think, Wych Hazel liked it, and felt all the more free for all sorts of undertakings, secured against consequences. Sometimes, indeed, his quick insight was so astonishing to the young mischief-maker, that she was ready to cry out treachery!—and the suspected person in this case was always Gotham. Yet when she charged upon Gotham some untimely frost which had nipped her budding plans, Gotham always replied—

'No, Miss 'Azel. I trust my 'onor is sufficient in his respect.'

She and Gotham had a singular sort of league,—defensive of Mr. Falkirk, offensive towards each other. She teased him, and Gotham bore it mastiff-wise; shaking his head, and wincing, and when he could bear it no longer going off. Wych Hazel?—yes, she was that.

And how did she win her name? Well, in the first place, "the nut-browne mayd" and she were near of kin. But whether her parents, as they looked into the baby's clear dark eyes, saw there anything weird or elfish,—or whether the name 'grew,'—of that there remains no record. She had been a pretty quiet witch hitherto; but now—

> "Once git a scent o' musk into a drawer,
> And it clings hold, like precerdents in law!'

—not Mr. Falkirk could get it out.

CHAPTER II.

BEGINNING A FAIRY TALE.

'MR. Falkirk, I *must* go and seek my fortune!' Wych Hazel made this little remark, sitting on a low seat by the fire, her arms crossed over her lap.

'Wherefore?' said her guardian.

'Because I want to, sir. I have no other than a woman's reason.'

'The most potent of reasons!' said Mr. Falkirk. 'The rather, because while professing to have no root, it hath yet a dozen. How long ago did Jack show his lantern, my dear?'

'Lantern!' said the girl, rather piqued,—adding, under her breath, 'I'm going to follow—Jack or no Jack! Why, Mr. Falkirk, I never got interested a bit in a fairy tale, till I came to—"And so they set out to seek their fortune." It's my belief that I belong in a fairy tale somewhere.'

'Like enough,' said her guardian shortly.

'So you see it all fits,' said Wych Hazel, studying her future fortunes in the fire.

'What fits?'

'My going to seek what I am sure to find.'

'That will ensure your missing what is coming to find you.'

'People in fairy tales never wait to see what will come, sir.'

'But, my dear, there is a difficulty in this case. Your fortune is made already.'

'Provokingly true, sir. But after all, Mr. Falkirk, I was not thinking of money.'

'A settlement, eh?' said Mr. Falkirk. 'My dear, when the prince is ready, the fairy will bring him.'

'Now, Mr. Falkirk,' said the girl, with her cheeks aglow, 'you know perfectly well I was not thinking of *that*.'

'Will you please to specify of what you *were* thinking, Miss Hazel?'

Miss Hazel leaned her head on her hand and reflected.

'I don't believe I can, sir. It was a kind of indefinite fortune,—a whole windfall of queer adventures and people and things.'

Mr. Falkirk at this turned round from his papers and looked at the girl. It was a pretty vision that he saw, and he regarded it somewhat steadily; with a little break of the line of the lips that yet was not merriment.

'My dear,' said he gravely, 'such birds seldom fly alone in a high wind.'

'Well, sir, never mind. Could you be ready by Thursday, Mr. Falkirk?'

'For what, Miss Hazel?'

'Dear me!' said the girl with a soft breath of impatience. 'To set out, sir. I think I shall go then, and I wanted to know if I am to have the pleasure of your company.'

'Do *I* look like a fairy tale?' said Mr. Falkirk.

He certainly did not! A keen eye for practical realities, a sober good sense that never lost its foothold of

common ground, were further unaccompanied by the graces and charms wherewith fairy tales delight to deck their favourites. Besides which, Mr. Falkirk probably knew what *his* fortune was already, for the grey was abundantly mingled with the brown in his eyebrows and hair. However, to do Miss Hazel's guardian justice, if his face was not gracious, it was at least in some respects fine. A man always to be respected, easily to be loved, sat there at the table, at his papers.

As for the little 'nut-browne mayd' who studied destiny in the fire, she merely glanced up at him in answer to this appeal; and with a shake of the head as if fairy tales and he were indeed hopelessly disconnected, returned to her musings. Then suddenly burst forth—

'I am so puzzled about the colour of my new travelling dress! "Contrasts," and "harmonies," and all that stuff, belong to the pink and white people. But pink and brown—Mr. Falkirk, do you suppose I can find anything browner than myself, that will set me off, and do?—I can't travel in gold colour.'

'You want to have as much as possible the effect of a picture in a frame?'

'Not at all, sir. That is just what I want to avoid. The dress *should* be a part of the picture.'

'I don't doubt it will be!' said Mr. Falkirk sighing. 'Before you set out, my dear, had you not better invest your property? so that you could live upon the gathered interest if the capital should fail.'

'I thought it was invested?' said the girl, looking up.

'Only a part of it,' replied Mr. Falkirk. 'Nothing but your money.'

'Nothing but!' said Wych Hazel. 'Why what more have I, Mr. Falkirk?'

'A young life,' said her guardian,—'a young and warm heart,—good looks, an excellent constitution, a head and hands that might do much. To which I might add,—an imagination.'

'My dear Mr. Falkirk,' said the girl laughing, 'I shall want them all to pay my travelling expenses. All but the last—and that is invested already, to judge by the interest.'

He smiled, a shaded smile, such as he often wore when she danced away from his grave suggestions. He never pursued her. But when she added,

'After all, sir, investments are your affair,'—

'My dear,' he said, 'a woman's jewels are in her own keeping—unless indeed God keep them. Yet let her remember that they are not hers to have and to hold, but to have and to use; a mere life interest—nor always that.'

And then for a while silence fell.

'Will you think me *very* extravagant if I get a new travelling dress, sir?' the girl began again.

'I have not usually been the guardian of your wardrobe, Miss Hazel.'

'No, sir, of course; but I wanted your opinion. You gave one about my jewels. And by the way, Mr. Falkirk, won't you just tell me the list over again?'

Mr. Falkirk turned round and bent his brows upon Wych Hazel now, but without speaking.

'Well, sir?' she repeated, looking up at him, 'what are they, if you please?'

'Two brilliants of the first water,' replied Mr. Falkirk looking down into her eyes. 'To which some people add, two fine bits of sardius.'

'And which some people say are set in bronze,'—said the young lady, but with a pretty little laugh and flush.

'Where do you propose the search should begin?' said the gentleman, disregarding this display.

'At Chickaree, sir. I should go down there at once, and so start from home in proper style.'

'And your plan of operations?' pursued Mr. Falkirk.

'Perfectly simple, sir. Of two roads I should always take the most difficult, and so on—ad infinitum.'

'Perfectly simple, indeed,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'Yet it might lead to a complication. I'm afraid it would prove a Western line of travel, my dear—end in a squirrel track, and run up a tree.'

'What a lookout we shall have!' said Wych Hazel. 'But about the dress, Mr. Falkirk—you know my last one is quite new—and I do so want another!'

'Then get it,' he said with a smile. 'Though I am afraid, my dear, it is hardly in keeping. Quickear began the search in rags, and Cinderella in ashes, and the "Fair one with the golden locks" had, I think, no other adornment. Puss in boots was indeed new rigged—but Puss was only a deputy. What do you say to sending me forth in boots, to seek a fortune for you?'

An irrepressible laugh rippled forth—sweet and sound, and, oh, so heartwhole!

'Let me see,' she said; 'To-day is Monday. To-morrow I will get the dress and distract my dressmaker. And next Monday we will set out, and take Chickaree for our first stage. My dear Mr. Falkirk—most potent, grave, and reverend sir,—if you sally forth as Puss in

boots, of course *I* shall at once turn into the Marquis of Carrabas, which would not suit your notions at all—confess!' she added, locking both hands round his arm, and flashing the brilliants before his eyes.

'Next Monday we will take the first stage for Chickaree,' said Mr. Falkirk in an unmoved manner. 'How many servants in your train, Miss Hazel?'

'None, sir. Mrs. Bywank is there already, and Mrs. Saddler can "forward" me "with care." I'll pick up a new maid by the way.'

'Will you pick up a page too? or does Dingee keep his place?'

'If he can be said to have one. O, Dingee, of course.'

'Wych Hazel,' said Mr. Falkirk from under his brows, 'what is your plan?—if you are capable of such a thing.'

'My plan is to unfold my capabilities, sir,—for your express benefit, Mr. Falkirk. We will beat the bush in every direction, and run down any game that offers.'

Mr. Falkirk turned his chair half away, and looked into the fire. Then slowly, but with every effect of expression, he repeated,—

> "A creature bounced from the bush,
> "Which made them all to laugh,
> "My lord," he cried, "A hare! a hare!"
> "But it proved an Essex calf."

'Yes,' said Wych Hazel with excellent coolness,—'men do make such little mistakes, occasionally. But this time I shall be along. Good night, sir.'

CHAPTER III.

CORNER OF A STAGE COACH.

'MISS HAZEL!—Dear Miss Hazel!—Dear *me*, Miss Hazel!—here's the morning, ma'am,—and Gotham, and Mr. Falkirk!'

So far the young eyes unclosed as to see that they could see nothing—unless the flame of a wind-tossed candle,—then with a disapproving frown they closed again.

'But Miss Hazel?' remonstrated Mrs. Saddler.

'Well?' said Wych Hazel with closed eyes.

'Mr. Falkirk's dressed, ma'am.'

'What is it to me if Mr. Falkirk chooses to get up over night?'

'But the stage, ma'am!'

'The stage can wait.'

'The stage won't, Miss Hazel,' said Mrs. Saddler, earnestly. 'And Gotham says it's only a question of time whether we can catch it now.'

Something in these last words had an arousing power, for the girl laughed out.

'Mrs. Saddler, how *can* one wake up, with the certainty of seeing a tallow candle?'

'Dear me,' said Mrs. Saddler hurrying to light two tall sperms, 'if *that's* all, Miss Hazel—'

'That is not all. What's the matter with Mr. Falkirk this morning?'

'Why nothing, ma'am. Only he said you wanted to take the first stage for Chickaree.'

'Which I didn't, and don't.'

'And Gotham says,' pursued Mrs. Saddler, 'that if it *is* the first, ma'am, we'll save a day to get to Chickaree on Thursday.'

Whereupon, Wych Hazel sprung at once into a state of physical and mental action which nearly blew Mrs. Saddler away.

'Look,' she said, tossing the curls over her comb,—'there's my new travelling dress on the chair.'

'Another new travelling dress!' said Mrs. Saddler with upraised hands.

'And the hat ribbands match,' said Wych Hazel, 'and the gloves. And the veil is a shade lighter. Everything matches everything, and everything matches me. You never saw my match before, did you Mrs. Saddler?'

'Dear me! Miss Hazel,' said the good woman again. 'You do talk so wonderful!'

It was splendid to see her look of dismay, and amusement, and admiration, all in one, and to catch a glimpse of the other face—fun and mischief and beauty, all in one too! To put on the new dress, to fit on the new gloves,—Wych Hazel went down to Mr. Falkirk in admirable spirits.

Mr. Falkirk looked gloomy. As indeed anything might, in that hall; with the front door standing open, and one lamp burning till day should come; and the chill air streaming in. Mr. Falkirk paced up and down with the air of a man prepared for the worst. He shook Wych Hazel grimly by the hand, and she laughed out,

'How charming it is, sir? But where's breakfast?'

'Breakfast, Miss Hazel,' said her guardian solemnly. 'is never, so far as I can learn, taken by people setting out to seek their fortune. It is generally supposed that such people rarely have breakfast at all.'

'Very well, sir,—I am ready,'—and in another minute they were on their way, passing through the street of the little village, and then out on the open road, until after a half-hour's drive they entered another small settlement and drew up before its chief inn. Bustle enough here,—lamps in the hall and on the steps; lamps in the parlours; lamps running up and down the yards and road and dimly disclosing the outlines of a thorough bred stage coach and four horses, with the various figures pertaining thereto. Steadily the dawn came creeping up; the morning air—raw and damp—floated off the horses' tails, and flickered the lights, and even handled Wych Hazel's new veil. I think nothing but the new travelling dress kept her from shivering, as they went up the inn steps. People seeking their fortunes may at least *want* their breakfast.

But Mr. Falkirk was perverse. As they entered the hall, a waiter threw open the door into the long breakfast room—delicious with its fire and lights and coffee—(neither did the voices sound ill), but Mr. Falkirk stopped short.

'Is that the only fire you've got? I want breakfast in a private room.'

Now Mr. Falkirk's tone was sometimes one that nobody would think of answering in words,—of course, the waiter could do nothing but wheel about and open another door next to the first.

'Ah!' Mr. Falkirk said with immense satisfaction, as they stepped in.

'Ah!'—repeated his ward rather mockingly. 'Mr. Falkirk, this room is cold.'

Mr. Falkirk took the poker and gave the fire such a punch that it must have blazed uninterruptedly for half a day after.

'Cold, my dear?' he said beamingly—'no one can be cold long before such a fire as that. And breakfast will be here in a moment. If it comes before I get back, my dear, don't wait for me. How well your dress looks!'

'And I?—Mr. Falkirk,' said Wych Hazel.

'Why that's a matter of taste, my dear, of course. Some people you know are partial to black eyes—which yours are not. Others again—Ah, here is breakfast,—Now my dear, eat as much as you can,—you know we may not have any breakfast to-morrow. On a search after fortune, you never can tell.'

And helping her to an extraordinary quantity of everything on the tray, Mr. Falkirk at once went off and left her to dispose of it all alone. And of course he went straight into the next room. Didn't she know he would?—and didn't she hear the duo that greeted him?—'What, Mr. Falkirk!'—'Sir, your most obedient!'—and her guardian's double reply—'Back again, eh?'—and 'Your most obedient, Mr. Kingsland.' Wych Hazel felt provoked enough not to eat another mouthful. Then up came the stage, rumbling along to the front door; and as it came, in rushed Mr. Falkirk, poured out a cup of scalding coffee and swallowed it without a moment's hesitation.

'Coach, sir!' said the waiter opening the door.

'Coach, my dear?' repeated her guardian, taking her arm and whisking her down the hall and into the

stage, before the passengers in the long room could have laid down their knives.

'What is the use of being in such a hurry, Mr. Falkirk?' she said at last; much tried at being tossed gently into the stage like a brown parcel—(which to be sure she was, but that made no difference).

'My dear,' said Mr. Falkirk, solemnly, "there is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.'"

And with that he drew off his glove, leaned back, and passed his hand over his brow with the air of a man who had in some shape achieved success.

By this time the stream of passengers began to pour forth; and the coach creaked and swung to and fro, as trunk after trunk and man after man found their way up to the roof. Then the door was flung open, and other passengers tumbled in, the lantern flashing dimly upon their faces and coats. Three and three more,—and another, but his progress was stayed.

'Not in here, sir,' said Mr. Falkirk politely, 'I have paid for three seats.'

'There ain't another seat,' says the driver,—and he ain't a big man, sir—guess maybe you'll let him have a corner—we'll make it all right, sir.' He had a corner,—and so did our heroine! The new dress! Never mind; the sooner this went the sooner she would get another. And they rolled off, sweetly and silently, upon the country road. The morning was lovely. Light scarfs of fog floated about the mountain tops, light veils of cloud just mystified the sky; the tree-tops glittered with dew, the birds flew in and out; and through an open corner of her leathern curtain Wych Hazel peered out, gazing at the new world wherein she was going to seek her fortune

'Spend the Summer at Chickaree, Mr. Falkirk?' said a voice from the further end of the coach. Wych Hazel drew in her head and her attention, and sat back to listen.

'I did not say I was going there,' said her guardian dryly.

'Two and two make four, my good sir. There's not even a sign of a place of entertainment between Stone Bridge and Crocus, and Stone Bridge you have confessed to.'

'You consider places of entertainment among the essentials then?'

'Why, in some cases,' said the gentleman, with a suspicious glance at Wych Hazel's brown veil.

'How long is it since you were there, Mr. Falkirk?' inquired Mr. Kingsland's next neighbour.

This speaker was a younger man than Mr. Kingsland, and whereas that gentleman was a dandy, this one's dress was just one remove from that, and therefore faultless. About his face, so far off as the other end of the stage, there seemed nothing remarkable; it was grave, rather concise in its indications; but the voice prepared you for what the smile declared,—a nature joyous and unembittered; a spirit pure and honest and keen. Even Wych Hazel's guardian softened at his look.

'Pray, Mr. Falkirk?' said the other stranger, 'what is supposed to be the origin of the word "veil"?'

'I never heard,' said Mr. Falkirk dryly. 'Lost in the early records of civilization.'

'My dear sir!—of Barbarism!'

'Civilization has never entirely got rid of barbarism, I believe,' said Mr. Falkirk between his teeth; then out, 'By what road are you going, Rollo?'

'I should be happy to act as guide, sir. I leave the direct route.'

'Mr. Falkirk,' said Wych Hazel, 'just put your head a little this way, and see the veil of mist thrown over the top of that hill,'

Mr. Falkirk looked hastily, and resumed: 'You have lately returned, I hear, from your long foreign stay?'

'It was time.'

'Mr. Falkirk,' said his ward, 'do you consider *that* a remnant of the dark ages?'

'It keeps its place too gracefully for that,' said her guardian dropping his voice, as he looked across Wych Hazel out of the coach window.

'Mr. Falkirk' (sotto voce), 'you are charming!—Between ourselves, this is a hard place to keep gracefully. Please take out your watch, sir.'

Which Mr. Falkirk did, and silently showed it. Forth to meet his came a little gold hunting watch from behind the brown veil.

'You are a minute slow, sir—as usual.' Then very softly,—'Mr. Falkirk, what with being pressed and repressed, I am dying by quarter inches! Just introduce me for your grandmother, will you, and I will matronize the party.'

A request Mr. Falkirk complied with by entering forthwith into a long business discussion with another occupant of the stage coach, also known to him; in which stocks, commercial regulations, political enterprises, and the relative bearings of the same, precluded all reference to anything else whatever. Nobody's grandmother could have had less (visible) attention than Miss Hazel, up to the time when the coach rolled up to the door of a wayside inn, and the party got out to a lunch-

eon or early dinner, as some of them would have called it. Then indeed she had enough. Mr. Falkirk handed her out and handed her in; straight to the gay carpeted "Ladies' room;" shut the door carefully, and asked her what she would have. No other lady was there to dispute possession.

'Only a broiled chicken, sir—and a soufflé—and potatoes à la crême au gratin,' said Miss Hazel, throwing off her bonnet and curling herself down on the arm of the sofa. 'Mr. Falkirk, all my previous acquaintance with cushions was superficial!—And could you just open the window, sir, and throw back the blinds? last November is in this room, apples and all.'

Mr. Falkirk obeyed directions, remarking that people who travel in search of their fortune must expect to meet with November in unexpected places; then went off into the general eating-room, and by and by, from there or some other unsalubrious region came a servant, with half of an imperfectly broiled fowl and a muddy dish of coffee, flanked by a plate of watery pickled cucumbers. Mr. Falkirk himself presently returned.

'How does it go?' he said.

'What, Mr. Falkirk?' the young lady was curled down in one corner of the sofa, much like a kitten; a small specimen of which animal purred complacently on her shoulder.

'Could you eat, Miss Hazel?'

'Truly, sir, I could. Mr. Falkirk—what a lovely kitten! Do you remark her length of tail?'

Mr. Falkirk thought he had heard of "puss in boots" before, but never had the full realization thereof till now.

'You have tasted nothing,' he said. 'What shall I

get you? We shall be off in a few minutes, and you will not have another chance till we reach Hadyn's Dam.'

'Thank you, sir. A few minutes of undisturbed repose—with the removal of those cucumbers—and the restoration of that chicken to its other and I hope better half, is all that I require.'

'You will have rest at Hadyn's Dam,' said Mr. Falkirk with a face more expressive than his words.—'The bridge there is broken.'

'Queer place to rest, sir! Mr. Falkirk—there is Mr. Kingsland wondering why you keep me here.'

'He's eating his dinner.'

'Is he? I am afraid there will be crumbs in the piazza,' said Wych Hazel, closing her eyes. 'He says he don't wonder you are kept.'

'What shall I get you, Wych? You cannot go from here to the next stopping place without anything,' Mr. Falkirk said kindly.

'If you could find me, sir, a basket that would just hold this kitten'—

Mr. Falkirk wasted no more words, but went off, and came back with a glass of milk and a plate of doubtful 'chunks' of cake. The room was empty. Bonnet and veil were gone, and even the kitten had disappeared. Meanwhile the stage coach rattled and swung up to the piazza steps, where were presently gathered the various travellers, one by one. 'Mr. Falkirk,' said Mr. Kingsland, as that gentleman came out rather hastily to see if his charge might be there, too, 'you are not surely—agoing on alone?'

Back went Mr. Falkirk into the house again to look for his missing ward, who had plainly been foraging.

On the table was a paper of crackers; two blue-eyed and blue-aproned youngsters stood watching every motion as she swallowed the glass of milk, and in her hand was a suspicious looking basket. Wych Hazel set down her empty tumbler.

'My dear Mr. Falkirk, I was beginning to be concerned about you!'

'What are you going to do with that basket, Miss Hazel?'

'Take it along, sir.'

'On your lap, I suppose!'

'Mr. Falkirk, the accuracy of your judgment is unparalleled. Is that our coach at the door?'

'My dear, you will find plenty of cats at Chickaree,' said her guardian, looking annoyed.

'Yes, sir—' said the young lady meekly, dropping her veil and fitting on her gloves.

'All right, sir,' said the landlord appearing at the door. 'Roughish road, Mr. Falkirk—and t'other gents not enough patience to divide among 'em and go half round—'

How much patience Mr. Falkirk carried to the general stock does not appear. But presently, lifting one corner of her basket lid, Wych Hazel drew forth a radiant spray of roses, and laid them penitently upon the averted line of her guardian's coatsleeve.

'Where did you get that?' he said. 'You had better put it in the basket, my dear; it will stand a better chance to keep fresh.'

'Do you prefer pinks, sir?—or here are bachelor's buttons—'

'They seem rather common things to me,' said Mr. Falkirk slowly, yet with a somewhat pacified brow. There was no kitten in the basket!

'I hadn't the heart to bring puss, as we were going to Catskill,' whispered Miss Hazel.

'We!' ejaculated Mr. Falkirk.

'Nominative case, first person plural, sir.'

'And what's the definition of an adverb?'

'Something which qualifies your suffering—*n'est ce pas*, Mr. Falkirk?'

'Certainly, by its primary action upon your doing, Miss Hazel. We are going to Chickaree.'

To which statement Miss Hazel for the present made no reply. She retreated to the depths of her own corner and the brown veil; fingering her roses now and then, and (apparently) making endless mental 'studies' of the wayside. The coach jogged lumberingly on: there was no relief to the tiresomeness of the way. It was a long morning. Dusty and weary, the coach-load was set down at last at another country inn; by the side of a little river which had well filled its banks. The travellers were not, it must be noted, upon any of the great highways of passage, but had taken a cut across country, over some of the spurs of the Catskill; where a railroad was not. Mr. Falkirk brought his charge into the 'Ladies' parlour,' and spoke in a tone of irritated business.

'This is Haydn's Dam. You can have rest and dinner now.'

CHAPTER IV.

FELLOW TRAVELLERS.

'DINNER—and the rest of it,' translated Miss Hazel. 'Will it be needful to make a grand toilette, sir? or shall I go to the table as I am? If one may judge of the selectness of the company by their conversation'—

'You'll see no more of the company,' said Mr. Falkirk; 'they are going another way, and we have to wait here. The bridge will be repaired to-morrow, I suppose.'

'Yes, sir. We don't dine upon the bridge, I presume?'

Mr. Falkirk went off, making sure that the door latched behind him. In a quarter of an hour he came back, with an attendant bearing a tray.

'At present fortune gives us nothing more remarkable than fried ham,' he said,—'and that not of the most eatable, I fear. She is a jade. But we'll get away to-morrow. I hope so.'

'My dear sir,' said Wych Hazel with a radiant face, 'we will get away to-night. I find that the bridge is *not* on our road, after all. So I said it was not worth

while to get a room ready for me,—and the baggage might be just transferred.'

'To what?'

'To the other stage, sir. Or indeed I believe it is some sort of a baggage wagon—as the roads are heavy —not to speak of the passengers. It has gone on up the mountain.'

'What has?' exclaimed Mr. Falkirk, whose face was a study.

'The wagon,' said Miss Hazel, seating herself by the table. 'More particularly, your one trunk and my six, sir.'

'Where has it gone?'

'Up the mountain, sir. They were afraid of making the stage top heavy—the weight of intellect inside being small.'

'Do you mean, to Catskill?'

'Yes, sir. Poor little puss!—Does the vegetation hereabouts support nothing but pigs?' said Miss Hazel, with a despairing glance from the dish of ham to a yellow haired lassie in a blue gown, who just then brought in a pitcher of water. Mr. Falkirk waited till the damsel had withdrawn, and went to the window and came back again before he spoke.

'You should have consulted me, Miss Hazel. You are bewildered. It is not a good time to go up the mountain now.'

'Bewildered? I!' was Miss Hazel's only answer.

'Yes, you don't know what is good for you. I shall send for those trunks, Wych.'

'Quite useless, sir. There is nothing else going up to the Mountain House till we go ourselves. We will go for them—there is nothing like doing your own business.'

'You will find that out one day,' muttered her guardian.

'Seeking my fortune, and wait for the mending of a bridge!' Hazel went on. 'And then I said I was going to Catskill,—and then you're the best guardian in the world, Mr. Falkirk, so it's no use looking as if you were somebody else.'

'I shall be somebody else directly,' said Mr. Falkirk in a cynical manner. 'But eat your dinner, Miss Hazel; you will not have much time.'

A meal for which he did not seem to care himself, for there was no perceivable time when he took it.

The stage coach into which the party presently stowed themselves, held now but those four—Mr. Falkirk and his ward, and two gentlemen who had declared themselves on the way to the mountain. The former established themselves somewhat taciturnly in the several corners of the back seat, and so made the journey; that is to say, as much as possible, for Mr. Falkirk being known to the other could not avoid now and then being drawn into communication with them. One, indeed, Mr. Kingsland, made many and divers overtures to that effect. His elegance of person and costume was advantageously displayed in an opposite corner, from whence he distributed civilities as occasion offered. His book and his magazine were placed at the brown veil's disposal; he stopped the coach to buy cherries from a wayside farm, which cherries were in like manner laid at Wych Hazel's feet; and his observations on the topics that were available, demonstrated all his stores of wit and wisdom equally at hand and ready for use. But brown veil would none of them all. The daintiest of hands took two cherries and signed away the rest;

the sweetest of girl voices declined the magazine or gave it over to Mr. Falkirk. If the eyes burned brown lights (instead of blue) in their seclusion, if the voice just didn't break with fun, perhaps only Mr. Falkirk found it out, and he by virtue of previous knowledge. But in fact, Miss Hazel gave the keenest attention to everybody and everything.

A contrast to Mr. Kingsland was their other fellow-traveller. Mr. Rollo occupying the place in front of Mr. Falkirk, made himself as much as possible at ease on the middle seat, with his back upon the persons who engaged Mr. Kingsland's attention; but he did not thereby escape theirs. When a society is so small, the members of it almost of necessity take note of one another. The little brown-veiled figure could not help noticing what a master he was in the art of making himself comfortable; how skilfully shawls were disposed; how easily hand and foot, back and head, took the best position for jolting up the hill. It amused her as something new; for Mr. Falkirk belonged to that type of manhood which rather delights in being *un*comfortable whenever circumstances permit; and other men she had seen few. Mr. Rollo had a book too, which he did not offer to lend; and he gave his lazy attention to nothing else—unless when a bright glance of eye went over to Mr. Kingsland. He was as patient as any of the party; as truly he had good reason, being by several degrees the most comfortable. But Mr. Falkirk moved now and then unrestingly, and the back seat was hot and cramped,—and Wych found the jolts and heavings of the coach springs a thing to be borne. And that swinging and swaying middle seat, with its one occupant came so close upon *her* premises, that she dared

not adventure the least thing, even to Mr. Falkirk. If the momentary relief of turning that grey travelling shawl into a pincushion, occurred to her, nothing came of it; the thick folds were untouched by one of her little fingers. She put her face as nearly out of the coach as she could, and perhaps enjoyed the scenery, if anyone did. Mr. Falkirk gave no sign of enjoyment, mental or physical, and Mr. Kingsland would certainly have been asleep, but for losing sight of the brown veil—and of possible something it might do. Yet now and then there were fine reaches for the eye, beautiful knoll y indications of a change of surface, which gave picturesque lights and shades on their soft green. Or a lonely valley, with smooth fields and labourers at work, tufty clumps of vegetation, and a line of soft willows by a watercourse, varied the picture. Then the ascent began in good earnest, and trees shut it in, and there was everywhere the wild leafy smell of the woods. Night began to shut it in to, for the sun was early hidden from the travellers; the gloom, or the fatigue of the way, gathered inside the coach as well, on all except the occupant of the middle seat. Sometime before this his ease-seeking had displayed itself in a new way; and letting himself out of the coach door he had kept up a progress of his own by the side of the vehicle, which quite distanced its slow and toilsome method of advance. For Rollo was not only getting on with a light step up the road, but making acquaintance with every foot of it; gathering flowers, pocketing stones, and finding time to fling others, which rebounded with a racketty hop, skip and jump, down the side of the deep ravine on the edge of which the way was coasting. Then making up for his delay by a mode of locomotion which

seemed to speak him kindred to the squirrels, he swung himself over difficult places by the help of hanging branches of trees, and bounded from rock to rock, till he was again far ahead of the horses, and of the road too, lost out of sight in another direction. Now and then a few rich notes of a German air came down, or up, to the coach tantalizingly. Certainly Mr. Rollo was enjoying himself; and it was made more indubitably certain to the poor plodders along inside the coach, by the faint fumes of an excellent cigar which 'whiles' made themselves perceptible.

Now to say the truth, it was all tantalizing to Wych Hazel. In the first place she was, as she had said, 'cramped to death,' physically and mentally,—both parts of her composition just spoiling for a fight; and whereas she had hitherto kept her face well out of the window, now she drew it resolutely within, for with somebody to look at, it did not suit Miss Hazel's ideas to be looking. She could not tease Mr. Falkirk, who had gone to sleep; Mr. Kingsland was absolutely beyond reach, except of rather thorny wishes; and when at length the dilettante cigar perfumes began to assert themselves, Wych Hazel flung the rest of her patience straight out of the window, and looked after it. The coach was stopping just then by another wayside inn, to exchange mail-bags and water the horses, and favoured by the gathering dusk, a sharp business transaction at once went into effect between the young lady within and some one without; whereof nothing at first transpired. Mr. Kingsland knew only that on one side the tones might rival a mountain brook for their soft impetuosity. There was 'a show of hands' too, and then the coach jolted on and Mr. Falkirk woke up;

but not till the tired horses had gone down one pitch and up another, did he hear a faint 'mew' which raised its voice at his elbow.

'What have you got there?' he said hastily.

'A pair of whiskers, sir.'

'Where did you get that thing?' was the next demand, made with considerable disgust.

'Really, sir—whiskers not being contraband—'

Mr. Falkirk was a patient man; at least Wych Hazel generally found him so; and at present he merely fell back into his corner, without making his thoughts any further apparent than the gesture made them. He offered no remark, not even when the dismayed condition of the whiskers aforesaid suggested sundry earnest and energetic efforts at escape, with demonstrations that called up Miss Hazel from the quietude of her corner to be earnest and active in her turn. Frightened, not sure of the kind intentions of the little hands that kept such firm hold,—the kitten struggled and growled, and at last sent forth its feelings in a series of mews, sostenuto and alto to an alarming degree. Mr. Kingsland smiled—then coughed,—and Wych Hazel's laugh broke forth in a low but very defined 'Ha! ha!'

'Mr. Falkirk,' she said, 'please open your heart and give me a biscuit.'

'Mr. Falkirk,' cried a cheerful voice, rather low, from the other side of the road, 'what have you got on board?'

If Mr. Falkirk's inward reply had been spoken aloud and in a past age, it might have cost poor Miss Hazel her life; as it was, he only said, 'Can you cut a broomstick, Rollo?' The answer perhaps went into action, for the young man disappeared.

Turning its wee head from side to side, as it munched the biscuit, soothed by the soft touch of soft hands, the kitten so far forgot herself as to break now and then into a loud irregular purr; but her little mistress was absolutely silent and still, though the light fingers never ceased their caressing, until puss had finished the biscuit and purred herself to sleep. By this time the coach jogged along in absolute darkness, except for what help the stars gave. The plashing of a stream over its rough bed far down below, gave token sometimes that the wheels of the coach were near an abyss; the flutter of leaves told that the forest was all around them always. The irregular traveller had re-entered the coach and sat among his shawls as still as the rest of the party; who perhaps were all slumbering as well as the kitten. It appeared so; for when that small individual started to consciousness and consequent alarm again, and was making an excursion among the feet of the gentlemen on the coach floor, its aroused mistress was only aroused in time to hear a consolatory whisper from one of her companions—'Poor little Kathleen Mavourneen, by what misfortune did you get in here? There—be still and go to sleep.' And as no more was heard, on either side, it seemed probable the advice had been followed. At any rate no more was seen of the kitten, not even when the stage coach swept round the level on which the house stands, and drew up at the door, where the light of lamps gave opportunity for observation. Wych Hazel only saw that her neighbour flung a shawl demurely enough over one shoulder and arm, where the cat *might* have been, and letting himself out, proceeded to do the same office with full dexterity though with one hand for the little cat's mistress.

Ensconcing herself even closer than ever in mantle and veil, Wych Hazel passed on through the gay groups to the foot of the stairs, there paused.

'Mr. Falkirk,' she said softly, 'I want my tea up stairs, please,'—and passed on after the maid.

'So,' said one of the loiterers in the hall approaching Mr. Falkirk, 'so my dear sir, you've brought Miss Kennedy! At last!—Now for candidates. If the face match the hand and foot, the supply will be heavy.'

CHAPTER V.

IN THE FOG.

THERE was mist everywhere. On the winding bed of the river, lying piled like a gray eider-down coverlet; folding itself over the forest trees; floating up to the Mountain House, and hanging about the rocks. But overhead the sky looked bright, and Sirius waved his torch which the vapour had filled with coloured lights. As yet sunrise was not.

In front of the house, where a grey rock started from the very edge of the bank, spreading a platform above the precipice, sat Wych Hazel; her feet so nearly over the rock that they seemed resting on the mist itself; her white scarf falling back from her head like a wreath of lighted coloured vapour. Perhaps there were no other strangers to the Mountain House within its walls; perhaps the morning was too chill; perhaps all of the 'candidates' were on the other side; for she sat alone. Until the flaming torch of Sirius paled, until the dawn began to shimmer and gleam among the fleeces of mist, —until they parted here and there before the arrows of light, showing spires and houses and a bit of the river in the far distance. So fair, unfeatured, misty and

sparkling at once, lay life before the young gazer. Mr. Falkirk might have moralized thus, standing close behind her as he was, still and silent; but it is not likely he did; useless moralizing was never in Mr. Falkirk's way.

'How do you like your fortune, Miss Hazel, as you find it at present?' he said.

'Very undefined, sir. Good morning, Mr. Falkirk—what made you get up?'

'My knowledge of your character.'

'So attractive, sir?' She glanced up at him, then looked away over the mist, with her arms crossed over her bosom and a grave look of thought settling down upon her young face; as if womanhood were dawning upon her, with its mysterious opalescent light.

'Evangeline saw her way all clear when she reached the mountain-top,' she said musingly; 'but mine looks misty enough. Mr. Falkirk, will this fog clear away before sunset?'

'Or settle down into rain.'

But while he spoke, the sun mounting higher, shot through the very heart of the mist; and the broken clouds began to roll away in golden vapour, or were furled and drawn up with bands of light. And now came voices from the piazza.

'You knew it last night, Mr. Kingsland? and never told me!' said an oldish lady. 'And there is the sweet creature this minute, on the rock!'

Wych Hazel sprang to her feet. 'Mr. Falkirk,' she said, 'you are inquired for;'—and darting past him she vanished round the house. Mr. Falkirk, as in duty bound, followed; but when a needful point of view was attained, his charge was nowhere within sight, and he

returned to the house to be in readiness to meet her when the bell should ring for breakfast.

But a couple of hours later, when the bell rang, Miss Hazel was not forthcoming. The guests gathered to the breakfast-room. Mr. Falkirk remained in the empty hall, pacing up and down from door to door, then went to see if Wych Hazel were by chance in her room. Mrs. Saddler was in consternation, having heard nothing of her. Mr. Falkirk returned to his walk in the hall, chaffing a little now with something that was not patience. Presently Rollo came down the stairs.

'Good morning.'

'Good morning.'

'Exercise before breakfast?—Or after?'

'Not after,' said Mr. Falkirk; 'but you are late as it is.'

'Better late, if you can't be early. You have a better chance. I will wait with you, if you are waiting.'

'Don't wait for me,' said Mr. Falkirk, shortly. 'I have no idea when I shall be ready.'

'I had no idea, a little while ago, when *I* should. By the way, I hope Miss Kennedy is well, this morning?'

'I hope so.'

'She is not down yet?'

'She has been down, and I have not heard of her going up again.'

'In the breakfast-room, perhaps,' said the young man. And passing on, he made his way thither, while Mr. Falkirk stood at the hall door. No, Miss Kennedy was not in the breakfast-room; and instead of sitting down Mr. Rollo went out by another way, picking up a roll from the table as he passed, and wrapping it in a napkin. He took a straight course to the woods, over the

grass, where no uninstructed eye could see that the dew had been brushed away by a lighter foot than his. But if lighter, hardly so swift as the springy stride and leap which carried him over yards of the rough way at a bound, and cleared obstacles that would have hindered, at least slightly, most other people. The mountain was quickly won in this style, and Rollo gained a high ledge where the ground lay more level. He went deliberately here, and used a pair of eyes as quick as might match the feet, though not to notice how the dew sparkled on the moss or how the colours changed in the valley. He was far above the Mountain House, on the wild hillside. The sun had scattered the fog from the lower country, which lay a wide dreamland to tempt the eye; and nearer by the lesser charms of rock and tree, moss and lichen, light and shadow, played with each other in wildering combinations. But Rollo did not look at valley or hill; his eyes were seeking a gleam of colour which they had seen that morning once before; and seeking it with the spy of an eagle. No grass here gave sign of a footstep. Soft lichen and unbending ferns kept the secret, if they had one; the evergreens were noisy with birds, but otherwise mute; the fog still settled down in the ravines and hid whatever they held.

Thither Mr. Rollo at last took his way, after a moment's observation: down the woody, craggy sides of a wild dell; the thick vapour into which he plunged sufficiently bewildering even to his practised eyes. Partridges whirred away from before him, squirrels chattered over his head, but his particular quarry Mr. Rollo could nowhere find. Through that ravine and up the next ledge, with the sun rising hotter and hotter, and breakfast long over at the Mountain House.

He found her at last so suddenly that he stopped short. She was tired probably, for she had dropped herself down on the moss, her cheek on her hands, and had dropped her eyelids too, in something very like slumber ; the clear brown cheek bearing its usual pink tinges but faintly. The figure curled down upon the moss was rather tall, of a light build ; the features were not just regular ; the hair of invisible brown lay in very wayward silky curls ; and the eyes, as soon could be seen, were to match, both as to colour and waywardness. The mouth was a very woman's mouth, though the girlish arch lines had hardly yet learned their own powers whether of feeling or persuasion. Very womanish, too, was the sweep of the arm outline, and the hand and foot were dainty in the extreme. Neither hand or foot stirred for other feet approaching, the pretty gypsy having probably tired herself into something like unconsciousness ; and the first sound of which she was thoroughly sensible was her own name. The speaker was standing near her when she looked up, with his hat in his hand, and an air of grave deference. He expressed a fear that she was fatigued.

She had half-dreamily opened her eyes and looked up at first, but there was nothing 'fatigued' in the way the eyes went down again, nor in the quick skill with which the scarf was caught up and flung round her, fold after fold, until she was muffled and turbaned like an Egyptian. Then she rose demurely to her feet.

'Thank you, sir, for arousing me. Is Mr. Falkirk here?'

'No—I am alone. But you are at a distance from home. Can you go back without some refreshment?' The words and the speaker were quiet enough, but Wych Hazel's colour stirred uneasily.

'Yes. Don't let me detain you, sir,' she said, putting herself in quick motion across the moss. He met her on the other side of a big boulder and stayed her, though with the quietest manner of interference.

'I beg your pardon—but if you wish to go home—'

'Yes' she answered, with a half laugh, glancing up at the sun; 'I know. I am only going round this way.'

He stayed her still. 'I can guide you this way,' he said; 'but—it is not the way to the House.'

Another glance at the sun. 'Which is the way?'

'I will show it to you. Do you care most for speed or smooth going? You are tired?'

Wych Hazel knit her brows into the most abortive attempt at a frown. What right had he to suppose that she was tired!

'If you will just show me the way, sir—the shortest; I mean, point out the direction.'

He was standing and waiting her pleasure with contented gravity. 'The direction is not to be followed in a straight line,' said he. 'I can only show you by going before. Is that your meaning?'

'I should like to get home the shortest way,' said she hesitating.

He went on without more words, and maintaining the polished gravity of his first address; but Wych Hazel had reason to remember her walk of that morning. It was a shorter way than he had come, that by which her conductor took her, and in parts easy enough; but in other parts requiring his skill as well as hers to get her over them. He said not a word further; he served her in silence: the vexatious thing was, that he was able to serve her so much. Many a time she had to accept his hand to get past a rude place; often both hands were

needed to swing her over a watercourse or leap her down from a rock. She was agile and light of foot ; she did what woman could ; it was only by sheer necessity that she yielded the mortifying tacit confession to man's superior strength, and gave so often opportunity to a pair of good eyes to see what she was like near at hand. Wych Hazel's own eyes made few discoveries. She could *feel* every now and then that her conductor's hand and foot were as firm and reliable as the mountain itself. This course of travelling brought them, however, soon to the level of the Mountain House and to plain going. There Mr. Rollo fell behind, allowing the young lady to take her own pace in crossing the lawn and the hall, only attending her like her shadow to the foot of the stairs. With the first reaching of level ground, he had had a full look and gesture of acknowledgment ; what became of him afterwards Miss Hazel seemed not to know. *He* knew that she ran up the first flight of stairs, and that once out of sight her steps drooped instantly.

'So!' said Mr. Kingsland, advancing. 'Really! Rollo my dear fellow, how are we to understand this?'

'Give us an introduction after lunch, will you?' said another.

'But, Mr. Rollo, how extraordinary!' said one of the dowagers.

'Madame!' said Mr. Rollo, waiting upon the last speaker, hat in hand.

'Let him alone, my dear lady!' said Mr. Kingsland ; 'he's got to prepare for coffee and pistols with Mr. Falkirk. And coffee I fancy he's ready for—eh, Dane? Go get your breakfast, and I'll break matters gently to the guardian.'

'Will you do that, my dear fellow?'

'Can you doubt me?'

'I wish you would, for I am hungry,' said Dane, drawing his hand over his face. 'Mr. Falkirk is going off toward the cataract—just run after him and tell him that his ward is come home;—has *he* had breakfast?'

'Run, I guess I—wont!' said Mr. Kingsland. 'But to be the first bearer of *welcome* news'—And Mr. Falkirk roaming among trees and rocks was presently accosted by two gentlemen.

'Allow me, my dear sir, to congratulate you,' said the foremost. 'Miss Kennedy is safe. Our friend Rollo has with his usual sagacity gone straight to the mark, and without a moment's thought of his own breakfast or strength has found the young lady and followed her home.'

'She is at home, then?' said Mr. Falkirk.

'She is at home, sir; the Mountain House is made radiant by her presence. And now, permit me—Dr. Maryland,—son of your friend at Chickaree. Only your neighbour upon Christian principles here, sir, but bona fide neighbour at Chickaree, and most anxious to be acquainted with the fair owner thereof.'

Too honest-hearted to feel the inuendo of Mr. Kingsland's last words, their undeniable truth flushed Dr. Maryland somewhat as he shook hands with Mr. Falkirk. He was a well looking young man, with a clear blue eye which said the world's sophistications would find no Parley the porter to admit them; and Mr. Falkirk would certainly have begun to like his young neighbour on the spot, if he had not been on a sudden summoned to the house.

Miss Hazel, speeding up-stairs in the manner before related, reached her room safely; but there proceeding

to answer or evade Mrs. Saddler's questions, also to indulge herself in sundry musings, did not indeed forget to despatch a peremptory order for breakfast; but as that refreshment was somewhat delayed, the young lady in an impatient fit of time-saving began to change her dress, and fainted away charmingly during the process. At which moment the maid and breakfast entered the room, and the former promptly set down her tray, and ran off to summon the only doctor then at the Mountain House.

Little did Dr. Maryland guess the meaning of those mysterious words—'a lady wants you!' Still less, what lady. And as by the time he reached the room, Miss Hazel opened her eyes for his express benefit, the doctor stopped short in the middle of the room, his ideas more unsettled than ever. But Mr. Falkirk, who had accompanied the doctor, though not expecting to find their paths all the way identical, pressed forward with a face of great concern.

'Miss Hazel!—is it you? What is the matter?'

'Do I look like somebody else, sir?'

Like nobody else! thought Dr. Maryland; while, learning the whole of Mrs. Saddler's explanations from the first five words, he went on to apply such remedies as were strongest and nearest at hand. In a medical point of view it was not perhaps needful that he should hold the coffee-cup himself all the time, but if this were not really his 'first case,' it bid fair to be so marked in his memory. Perhaps he forgot the coffee-cup, till Mr. Falkirk gently relieved him of it with a word of dismission, and the doctor modestly withdrew; then sending Mrs. Saddler for some bottled ale, Mr. Falkirk went on, 'Wych, where have you been?'

'Following the steps of my great predecessor, King Alfred, sir.'

'In what line?'

'Retiring from the enemy, sir, and being obliged to meet the Dane'—said Miss Hazel, innocently closing her eyes.

'Where?' said Mr. Falkirk, shortly.

'I don't know, sir. In some of the wild places favoured by such outlaws. Don't you know, he has just come over the sea?'

There was a pause of some seconds.

'Wych,' said her guardian kindly, 'do you know it is not nice for little girls to make themselves so conspicuous as your morning walk has made you to day?'

Some feeling of her own brought the blood to her cheek and brow, vividly.

'I don't know what you call conspicuous, sir; only one person found me. And if you think I lost myself in the fog on purpose, Mr. Falkirk, you think me a much smaller girl than I am!'

Mr. Falkirk smiled—a little, passing his hand very lightly over the brow which did look certainly as if it had belonged to a little girl not very long ago; but he said no more, except to advise the young lady to eat a good breakfast.

Not to be conspicuous, however, from this day was beyond little Miss Hazel's power, to whatever degree it might have been within her wish. The house was at this time not yet filled; but of all its indwellers, old and young, male and female, higher and lower in the scale of society, every eye and tongue was at her service; so far as being occupied with her made it so. Every hand was at her service more literally. Did not the very

serving-men at table watch her eye? Was not he the best fellow who could recommend the hottest omelet and bring the freshest cakes to her hand? The young heiress, the young mistress of fabulous acres, and 'such a beautiful old place;' the new beauty, who bid fair to bewitch all the world with hand and foot and gypsy eyes,—nay, the current all set one way. Even old dowagers looked to praise, and even their daughters to admire; while of the men, all were at her feet. Attentions, civil, kind, and recommendatory, showered on Miss Hazel from all sides. Would that little head stand it, with its wayward curls and some slight indication of waywardness within? How would it keep its position over such a crowd of servants self-made in her honour? Some of them were very devoted servants indeed, and seemed willing to proclaim their devotion. Among these was Mr. Kingsland, who constituted himself her right-hand man in general; but Dr. Maryland was not far off, if less presuming. Miss Hazel could not walk or ride or come into a room without some sort of homage from one or all of these.

'Dear little thing! pretty little thing!' exclaimed a lady, an old acquaintance of Mr. Falkirk's, one evening. 'Charming little creature! How will she bear it?'

Mr. Falkirk was standing near by.

'She wants a better guardian,' the lady went on whispering.

'I wish she had a mother,' he said.

'Or a husband!'

Mr. Falkirk was silent; then he said: 'It is too soon for that.'

'Yes—too soon,' said the lady meditatively as she looked at Wych Hazel's curls,—'but what will she do?

Somebody will deceive her into thinking he is the right man, while it *is* too soon.'

'Nobody shall deceive her,' said Mr. Falkirk between his teeth.

It must be mentioned that an exception, in some sort, to all this adulation, was furnished by the friend of Miss Hazel's morning walk. Mr. Rollo, if the truth must be told, seemed to live more for his own pleasure than anybody else's. Why he had taken that morning's scramble unless on motives of unwonted benevolence, remained known only to himself. Since then he had not exerted himself in her or anybody's service. Pleasant and gay he was when anybody saw him; but nobody's servant. By day Mr. Rollo roamed the woods, for he was said to be a great hunter—or he lay on the grass in the shade with a book—or he found out for himself some delectable place or pleasure unknown previously to others, though as soon as known sure to be approved and adopted; and at evening the rich scents of his cigar floated in the air where the moonlight lay brightest or shadows played daintiest. But he did not seem to share the universal attraction towards the daintiest thing of all at the Mountain. He saw her, certainly; he was sometimes seen looking at her; but then he would leave the place where her presence held everybody, and the perfume of his cigar would come as aforesaid; or the distant notes of a song said that Mr. Rollo and the rocks were congenial society. If he met the little Queen of the company indeed anywhere, he would lift his hat and stand by to let her pass with the most courtier-like deference; he would lift his hat to her shadow; but he never testified any inclination to follow it. The more notable this was, because Rollo was a pet of the world

himself; one of those whom every society welcomes, and who for that very reason perhaps are a little nonchalant towards society.

It was a proof how gayly and sweetly she took the popular vote, that she bore so easily his defalcation. Vanity was not one of her pet follies; and besides, that morning's work had brought on Miss Hazel an unwonted fit of grave propriety; she was a little inclined to keep herself in the background. Amuse her the admiration did, however. It was funny to see Mr. Kingsland forsake billiards and come to quote Tennyson to her; Dr. Maryland's shy, distant homage was more comical yet; and the tender little mouth began to find out its lines and dimples and power of concealment. But the young heart had a good share of timidity, and that stirred very often; making the colour flit to and fro 'like the rosy light upon the sky'—Mr. Kingsland originally observed; while Dr. Maryland looked at the evening star and was silent. Compliments!—how they rained down upon her; how gayly she shook them off. And as to Mr. Rollo, if there was anything Miss Hazel disliked it was to submit to guidance; and she had been obliged to follow him out of the woods: and if he had presumed to admire her in the same style in which he had guided her, she felt quite sure there would have been a sparring match. Besides—but 'besides' is a feminine postscript; it would be a breach of confidence to translate it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RED SQUIRREL.

ONE brilliant night, Mr. Falkirk pacing up and down the piazza, Wych Hazel came and joined him; clasping both hands on his arm.

'Mr. Falkirk,' she said softly, 'when are we going to Chickaree?'

'I have no information, Miss Hazel.'

'Then I can tell you, sir. We take the "owl" stage day after to-morrow morning,—and we tell *nobody* of our intention.' And Wych Hazel's finger made an impressive little dent in Mr. Falkirk's arm.

'Why that precaution?' he inquired.

'Pity to break up the party, sir,—they seem to be enjoying themselves,'—And a soft laugh of mischief and fun rang out into the moonlight.

'Is this arrangement expected to be carried into effect?'

'Certainly, sir. If my guardian approves,' said Miss Hazel, submissively.

'What's become of her other guardian?' said an old lady, possessing herself of Mr. Falkirk's left arm.

'My other guardian!' said the young lady, expressively.

'She has no other,' said Mr. Falkirk, very distinctly.

'Have you broken the will?'

'No madam,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'As it often happens in this world, something has reached your ears in a mistaken form.'

'What something was it?' said Wych Hazel.

'A false report, my dear,' Mr. Falkirk says. Which did not quite satisfy the questioner at the time, but was soon forgotten in the rush of other things.

The next day was devoted to a musical pic-nic at the Falls. It was musical, in as much as a band had been fetched up to play on the rocks, while the company filled the house and balcony, and an occasional song or duet, which ladies asked for 'just to see how they would sound there,' kept up the delusion. By what rule it was a pic-nic it might be difficult to discover, except that it had been so styled. Eatables and drinkables were, to be sure, a prominent portion of the entertainment, and they were discussed with more informality and a good deal less convenience than if in their regular place. But, however, the rocks and the wildness lent them a charm, perhaps of novelty, and the whole affair seemed to be voted a success.

Success fell so largely to Miss Hazel's share, that she by times was a little weary of it, or of its consequences; and this day finding herself in a most inevitable crowd, do what she would, she fairly ran away for a breath of air with no musk in it. Making one or two the honoured confidants of her intention, that she might secure their staying where they were and keeping others, and promising to return soon, she slipped away down

the stairs by the Fall. All the party had been there that morning, as in duty bound, and had gone where it was the rule to go. Now Wych Hazel sprang along by herself, to take the wildness and the beauty in silence and at her own pleasure. At the upper basin of the Fall she turned off, and coasted the narrow path under the rock, around the basin. At the other side, where the company had been contented to turn about, Wych Hazel passed on; till she found herself a seat on a projecting rock, from which a wild, wooded ravine of the hills stretched out before her eyes. The sides were so bold, the sweep of them so extended, the woods so luxuriantly rich, the scene so desolate in its loneliness and wildness, that she sat down to dream in a trance of enjoyment. Not a sound now but the plash of the water, the scream of a wild bird, and the rustle of leaves. Not a human creature in sight, or the trace of one. Wych might imagine the times when red Indians roved among those hillsides—the place looked like them; but rare were the white hunters that broke their solitudes. It was delicious. The very air that fanned her face had come straight from a wilderness, a wilderness where it blew only over sweet things. It refreshed her, after those people up on the balcony. She had promised to be back soon: but now a rosy flower, or spike of flowers, of tempting elegance, caught her eye. It was down below her, a little way, not far; a very rough and steep way, but no matter, she must have the flower, and deftly and daintily she clambered down: the flower looked lovelier the nearer she got to it, and very rare and exquisite she found it to be, as soon as she had it in her hands. It was not till she had examined and rejoiced over it, that addressing herself to go back, Wych Hazel found her retreat

cut off. Not by any sudden avalanche or obstacle, animate or inanimate; as peacefully as before the wind waved the ferns on the great stepping stones of cliff and boulder by which she had come; but—the agility by which with help of vines and twigs she had let herself down those declivities, was not the strength that would mount them again. It was impossible. Wych Hazel saw that it was impossible, and certainly she would never have yielded the conviction but to dire necessity. She stood considering one particular jump down which she had made,—nothing but desperation could have taken her back again.

Desperate, however, Wych Hazel did not feel. There was nothing to do at present but to wait till her friends should find her; for to go further down would but add to her trouble and lessen her chance of being soon set free, and indeed, from her present position even to go down (voluntarily) was no trifle. So Wych Hazel sat down to wait, amusing herself with thoughts of the sensation on the cliff, and wondering what sort of scaling ladders could be improvised in a hurry. They would be sure to come after her presently. Some one would find her. And it was a lovely place to wait.

How it happened must remain like other mysteries, unexplained till the mystery is over, that the person who did find her again happened to be Mr. Rollo. Yet she had hardly seen him all day before that. Wych Hazel had half forgotten her situation in enjoying its beauties and musing in accordance with them; and then suddenly looking up to the great piece of rock nearest her, she saw him standing there, looking down at her with the calm face and handsome gray eyes which she had noticed before. The girl had been sing-

ing half to herself a wild little Scottish ballad, chiming it in with water and wind and bird music, taking first one part and then another; looping together a long chain of pine needles the while,—then throwing back her sleeve, and laying the frail work across her arm, above the tiny hair chain, the broad band of gems and the string of acorns, which banded it; in short, disporting herself generally. But not the "lullaby, baby, and all," of the old rhyme, ever had a more sudden and complete downfall. The first line of

"O wha wad buy a silken goun
Wi' a puir broken heart?"

was left as a mere abstract proposition; and Wych Hazel would assuredly have 'slipped from her moorings,' but for the certain fear of tearing her dress, or spraining her ankle, or doing some other bad thing which should call for immediate assistance. So she sat still and gazed at the prospect.

Her discoverer presently dropped down by her side and stood there uncovered, as usual, but this time he did not withdraw his eyes from her face. And when he spoke it was in a new tone, very pleasant, though laying aside a certain distance and form with which he had hitherto addressed her.

'Do you know,' he said, 'I begin to think I have known you in a former state of existence?'

'What sort of a person were you in a former state, Mr. Rollo?'

'I see the knowledge was not mutual. I am sorry.—This is a pleasant place!'

'This identical grey rock?'

'Don't you think so?'—in a tone which assumed the proposition.

'Very,' said Wych Hazel with a demure face;—'I do not know which abound most—the pleasures of Hope, Memory, or Imagination. But I thought perhaps you meant the mountain.'

'The pleasures of the Present, then, you do not perceive?' said Mr. Rollo, peering about very busily among the trees and rocks in his vicinity.

'Poor Hope and Imagination!' said Miss Hazel,—'must they be banished to the "former state?" Memory does hold a sort of middle ground.'

'There isn't much of that sort of ground here,' said Mr. Rollo; 'we are on a pretty steep pitch of the hill. Don't you like this wilderness? You want a gun though—or a pencil—to give you the sense that you have something to do in the wilderness.'

'Yes!' said Miss Hazel—'so Englishmen say: "What a nice day it is!—let's go out and kill something."'

There was a good deal of amusement and keenness in his sideway glance, as he demurely asked her 'if she didn't know how to shoot?' But Wych Hazel, with a slight gesture of her silky curls, merely remarked that she had pencils in her pocket—if he wanted one.

'Thank you—have you paper too?'

'Plenty.'

'That I may not seem intolerably rude,' said he, extending his hand for the paper,—'will you make one sketch while I make another? We will limit the time, as they did at the London Sketch Club.'

'O, I shall not think it even tolerably rude. But all my paper is in this book.'

'To secure the conditions, I must tear a leaf out.—How will that do?'

'Very well,' she said with a wee flitting of colour,—'if you will secure *my* conditions too.'

'What are they?' As he spoke he tore the leaf out and proceeded to accommodate himself with a pamphlet for a drawing board.

'You had no right to the leaf till you heard them!' she cried jumping up. 'I shall take care how I bargain with you again, Mr. Rollo.'

'Not safe?' said he smiling. 'But you are, this time, for I accepted the conditions, you know. And besides —you have the pencils yet.' There was a certain gay simplicity about his manner that was disarming.

'Did you?' said Hazel looking down at him. 'Then you are injudicious to accept them unheard. One of them is very hard. The first is easy—you are to restore the leaf when the sketch is done.'

'It is the decree of the strongest! And the other?'

'You are to confess my sketch to be the best. Now what is the subject to be?'

'Stop a bit!' said he, turning over the book which Wych Hazel had given him wrong side first—'I should like to see what I am to swear to, before we begin.' And the bits of her drawing which were found there received a short but keen consideration. 'The subject?—is this grey rock where we are—with what is on and around it.'

'You are lawless. And your subject is—unmanageable!'

'Do you think so?'

'You want what is "around" this grey rock,' she said with a light twirl on the tips of her toes. 'If your views on most subjects are as comprehensive!'—

'They can be met, nevertheless,' said he, laughing, 'if you take one part of the subject and I the other—and if you'll give me a pencil! We must be done in a quarter of an hour.'

'There it is,' said Wych Hazel,—'then you can take half the rock'—and she walked away to a position as far behind Mr. Rollo as sweetbriars and sumach would permit. That gentleman turned about and faced her gravely; also withdrew a step, looked at his watch, and throwing on his hat which had lain till now on the moss, went to work. It was work in earnest, for minutes were limited.

'Mr. Rollo?' said Wych Hazel, 'I cannot draw a thing if you sit there watching me. Just take your first position, please.'

'I should lose my point of view—you would not ask me to do that? Besides, you are safe—I am wholly occupied with myself.'

'No doubt! But if you presume to put *me* in your sketch I'll turn *you* into a red squirrel'—with which fierce threat Miss Hazel drooped her head till her 'point of view' must have been at least merged in the brim of her flat hat, and went at her drawing. That she had merged herself as well in the interest of the game, was soon plain,—shyness and everything else went to the winds: only when (according to habit) some scrap of a song broke from her lips, then did she rebuke herself with an impatient gesture or exclamation, while the hat drooped lower than ever. It was pretty to see and to hear her, —those very outbreaks were so free and girlish and wayward, and at the same time so sweet. Several minutes of the prescribed time slipped away.

'How soon do you go to Chickaree?' said the gentleman, in a pre-engaged tone, very busy with his pencil.

'How soon?' repeated the lady, surveying her own sketch—'why—not too soon for anybody that wants me away, I suppose. Ask Mr. Falkirk.'

'Is it long since you have seen the place?'

'I can hardly be said to have "seen" it at all. I think my landscape eyes were not open at that remote period of which you speak.'

'I was a red squirrel then, in the "former state" to which I referred a while ago. So you see your late threat has no terrors for me. Is it in process of execution?'

'O were you?' said Miss Hazel, absorbed in her drawing. 'Yes—but the expression is very difficult!—Did you think you knew me as a field mouse?'

He laughed a little.

'Then I suppose you have not the pleasure of knowing your neighbours, the Marylands?—except the specimen lately on hand?'

'No, I have heard an account of them,' said Miss Kennedy. 'For shame, Mr. Rollo, Dr. Maryland isn't a "specimen." He's good. I like him.'

The gentleman made no remark upon this, but confined his attention to his work for a few minutes; then looked at his watch.

'Is that sketch ready to show?—Time's up.'

'And the squirrel is down. But not much else.'

Not much!—the squirrel sat contemplatively gazing into Mr. Rollo's hat, which lay on the rock before him, quite undisturbed by a remarkable looking witch who rose up at the other end. The gentleman surveyed them attentively.

'Do you consider these true portraits?'

'I do not think the hat would be a tight fit,' said she, smothering a laugh.

'Well!' said he comically, 'it is said that no man knows himself—how it may be with women I can't

say!' And he made over the sketch in his hand and went to his former work; which had been cutting a stick.

There was more in this second sketch. The handling was effective as it had been swift. Considering that fifteen minutes and a lead pencil were all, there had been a great deal done, in a style that proved use and cultivation as well as talent. The rocks, upper and lower, were truly given; the artist had chosen a different state of light from the actual hour of the day, and had thus thrown a great mass into fine relief. Round it the ferns and mosses and creepers with a light hand were beautifully indicated. But in the nook where Wych Hazel had stationed herself, there was no pretty little figure with her book on her lap; in its place, sharply and accurately given, was a scraggy, irregular shaped bush, with a few large leaves and knobby excrescences which looked like acorns, but an oak it was not, still less a tree. The topmost branch was crowned with Miss Kennedy's nodding hat, and upon another branch lay her open drawing book. Miss Kennedy shook her head.

'I cannot deny the relationship!—Your style of handling is perhaps a trifle dry. That is not what you call an "ideal woman," is it, Mr. Rollo?'

'I might fairly retort upon that. What do you say to our moving from this ground, before the band up there gets into Minor?'

Retaking of a sudden her demureness, slipping away to her first position on the rock, with hands busy about the pink flowers, Wych Hazel answered, as once before—

'Do not let me detain you—do not wait for me, Mr. Rollo.'

'Shall I consider myself dismissed? and send some more fortunate friend to help you out of your difficulty?'

'I am not in any difficulty, thank you.'

'Only you don't know your way,' he said, with perhaps a little amusement, though it hardly appeared. 'Is it true that you will not give me the honour of guiding you?'

'In the first place,' said Miss Hazel, wreathing her pink flowers with quick fingers, 'I know the way by which I came, perfectly. In the second place, I never submit voluntarily to anybody's guidance.'

'Will you excuse me for correcting myself. I meant, in "not knowing your way," merely the way in which you are to *go*.'

'Do you know it?'

'If you suffer my guidance—undoubtedly.'

'Ah!—if. In that case so do I. But I "suffered" so much on the last occasion—and Dr. Maryland has left the Mountain.'

'I would not for the world be importunate! Perhaps you will direct me if I shall inform any one of your hiding place—or do you desire to have it remain such?'

'Thank you,' said Miss Hazel, framing the landscape in her pink wreath and gazing at it intently, 'I suppose there is not much danger. But if you see Mr. Falkirk you may reveal to him my distressed condition. He needs stimulus occasionally.'

Rollo lifted his hat with his usual Spanish courtesy; then disappeared, but not indeed by the way he had come. He threw himself upon an outstanding oak branch, from which, lightly and lithely, as if he had been the red squirrel himself, he dropped to some place out of sight. One or two bounds, rustling amid leaves and branches and he had gone from hearing as well as from view.

Wych Hazel had time to meditate. Doubtless she once more scanned the rocks by which inexplicably she had let herself down to her present position; but in vain, no strength or agility of hers, unaided, could avail to get up them again. Indeed it was not easy to see how aid could mend the matter. Miss Hazel left considering the question. It was a wild place she was in, and wild things suited it; the very birds, unaccustomed to disturbance, hopped near her and eyed her out of their bright eyes. If they could have given somewhat of their practical sageness to the human creature they were watching! Wych Hazel had very little of it, and just then, in truth, would have chosen their wings instead. She did not, even now, in their innocent, busy manners, read how much else they had that she lacked; though she looked at them and at all the other wild things. The tree branches that stretched as they listed, no axe coming ever upon their freedom; the moss and lichens that flourished in luxuriant beds and pastures, not breathed on by even a naturalist's breath; the rocks that they had clothed for ages, no one disturbing. The very cloud shadows that now and then swept over the ravine and the hillside, meeting nothing less free than themselves, scarce anything less noiseless, seemed to assert the whole scene as Nature's own. Since the days of the red men nothing but cloud shadows had travelled there; the nineteenth century had made no entrance, no wood-cutter had lifted his axe in the forest; the mountain streams, that you might hear soft rushing in the distance, did no work but their own in their citadel of the hills. Wych Hazel had time to consider it all, and to watch more than one shadow walk slowly from end to end of the long stretch of the moun-

tain valley, before she heard anything else than the wild noise of leaf and water and bird. At last there came something more definite, in the sounds of leaves and branches over her head; and then with certainly a little difficulty, Mr. Falkirk let himself down to her standing place. To say that Mr. Falkirk looked in a gratified state of mind would be to strain the truth, though his thick eyebrows were unruffled.

'How did you get here, Wych?' was his undoubtedly serious inquiry.

'Oh!' she said, jumping up, and checking her own wild murmurs of song,—'My dear Mr. Falkirk, how did you? What is the last news from civilization?' She looked wild wood enough, with the pink wreath round her hat and her curls twisted round the wind's fingers.

'But what did you come here for?'

'It's a pleasant place, sir—Mr. Rollo says. I was going to propose that you and I should have a joint summer house here, with strawberries and cream. Mr. Falkirk, haven't you a bun in your pocket?'

At this moment, and in the most matter-of-fact manner, presented himself her red squirrel friend, arriving from nobody knew where; and bringing not only himself but a little basket in which appeared—precisely—biscuits and strawberries. Silently all this presented itself. Wych Hazel's cheeks rivalled the strawberries for about a minute, but whether from stirred vanity or vexation it was hard to tell.

'Mr. Falkirk!' she cried, 'are all the rest of the staff coming? Here is the Commissary—is the Quartermaster behind, in the bushes?'

'I have no doubt we shall find him,' said Mr Falkirk, dryly. 'How did you get into this bird's nest, child?'

'She was drawn here, sir,—by a red squirrel.'

'I was not drawn!—Mr. Falkirk, what are they about up there, besides lamenting my absence.'

Mr. Falkirk seemed uneasy. He only looked at the little speaker, busy with her strawberries, and spoke not, but Rollo answered instead.

'They are looking over the rocks and endeavouring to compute the depth to the bottom, with a reference to your probable safety.' There was a shimmer of light in the speaker's eye.

'If they're taking mathematical views of the subject, they are in a dangerous way! Mr. Falkirk, it is imperatively necessary that I should at once rejoin the rest of society,—will you let yourself be torn from this rock, like a sea anemone?'

Mr. Falkirk had been for a few minutes taking a minute and business-like survey of the place.

'I see no way of getting you out, Wych,' he said despondingly, 'without a rope. I must go back for one, I believe, and you and society must wait.'

'How will *you* get out, sir?'

'I don't know. If I cannot, I'll send Rollo.'

'Pray send him, sir,—by all means.'

'I can get you out without a rope,' said that gentleman, very dispassionately.

'Pray do, then!' said the other.

'There is a step or two here of roughness, but it is practicable; and with your help we can reach smooth going in a very few minutes. A little below there is a path. Let me see you safe down first, Mr. Falkirk. Can you manage that oak branch?—stop when you get to the bottom—Stand there, now.'

With the aid of his younger friend's hand and eye,

Mr. Falkirk made an abrupt descent to the place indicated—a ledge not very far but very sheer below them. From a position which looked like a squirrel's, mid way on the rock with one foot on the oak, Rollo then stretched out his hand to Wych Hazel.

'Am I to stop when I get to the bottom?—most people like to do it before,' she said.

'You must. Come a little lower down, if you please. Take Mr. Falkirk's hand as soon as you reach footing.

It was no place for ceremony, neither could she help it. As she spoke, he took the young lady in both hands as if she had been a parcel, and swung her lightly and firmly, though it must have been with the exercise of great strength, down to a rocky cleft which her feet could reach and from which Mr. Falkirk's hand could reach her. Only then did Mr. Rollo's hand release her; and then he bounded down himself like a cat. Once more, very nearly the same operation had to be gone through; then a few plunging and scrambling steps placed them in a clear path, and the sound of the waters of the fall told them which way to take. With that, Rollo lifted his hat again gravely and fell back behind the others. Wrapping herself in her mood as if it had been a veil, Wych Hazel likewise bent her head — it might have been to both gentlemen; but then she sped forward at a rate which she knew one could not and the other would not follow, and disappeared among the leaves like a frightened partridge.

What was she like when they reached the party on the height? With no token of her adventure but the pink wreath round her hat and the pink flush under it, Miss Hazel sat there *à la reine;* Mr. Kingsland at her feet, a circle of standing admirers on all sides; her

own immediate attention concentrated on a thorn in one of her wee fingers. Less speedily Mr. Falkirk had followed her and now stood at the back of the group, silent and undemonstrative. Rollo had gone another way and was not any longer of the party.

CHAPTER VII.

SMOKE.

TO Chickaree by the stage was a two-days' journey. The first day presented nothing remarkable. Rollo was their only fellow traveller whom they knew ; and he did nothing to lighten the tedium of the way, beyond the ordinary courtesies. And after the first few hours the scenery had little to attract. The country became an ordinary farming district, with no distinctive features. Not that there be not sweet things to interest in such a landscape, for a mind free enough and eyes unspoiled. There are tints of colouring in a flat pasture field, to feed the eye that can find them ; there are forms and shadows in a rolling arable country, sweet and changing and satisfying. There are effects in tufts of spared woodland, and colours in wild vegetation, and in the upturned brown and umber of fields of ploughed earth, and in the grey lichened rocks and the clear tints of their broken edges. There are the associations and indications of human life, too ; tokens of thrift and of poverty, of weary toil and of well-to-do activity. Where the ploughs go, and the ploughmen ; where the cattle are driven afield ; where the farmyards tell how they are

housed and kept; where the women sit with their milking pails or make journeys to the spring; where flowers trim the house-fronts, or where the little yard-gate says that everything, like itself, hangs by one hinge. A good deal of life stories may be read by the way in a stage coach; but not until life has unfolded to us, perhaps, its characters; and so Wych Hazel did not read much and thought the ride tedious and long. When she turned to her companions, Mr. Falkirk was thoughtful and silent, Mr. Rollo silent and seemingly self-absorbed, and if she looked at the other occupants of the coach—Wych Hazel immediately looked out again.

The second day began under new auspices. None of their former fellow travellers remained with them; save only Rollo and the servants; and the empty places were taken by a couple of country women, one young and rustic, the other elderly and ditto. That was all that Wych Hazel saw of them. The fact that one of the women presently fell to eating gingerbread and the other molasses candy, effectually turned all Miss Kennedy's attention out of doors.

The cleared country was left behind; and the coach entered a region of undisturbed forest, through which it had many miles to travel before reaching civilization again. The view was shut in. The trees waved overhead and stretched along the road endlessly, too thick for the eye to penetrate far. The coach rumbled on monotonously. The smell of pines and other green things came sweet and odorous, but the day was hot, and everything was dry; the dust rose and the sunbeams poured down. Wych Hazel languished for a change. Only a red squirrel now and then reminded her what a lively life she led a day or two ago. And Mr. Falkirk

seemed too indifferent to mind the weather, and Rollo seemed to like it! She was very weary. Taking off her hat and leaning one hand on her guardian's shoulder, she rested her head there, too—looking out with a sort of fascinated intentness into the hazy atmosphere, which grew every moment thicker and bluer and more intensely hazy. It almost seemed to take shape, to her eye, and to curl and wave like some animated thing among the still pines. The countrywomen were dozing now; Mr. Rollo and Mr. Falkirk mused, or possibly dozed too; it made her restless only to look at them. Softly moving off to her own corner, Wych Hazel leaned out of the window. Dark and still and blue—veiled as ever, the pines rose up in endless succession by the roadside; a yellow carpet of dead leaves at their feet, the woodpeckers busy, the squirrels at play over their work. How free they all were!—with what a sweet freedom. No danger that the brown rabbit darting away from his form, would ever transgress pretty limits!—no fear that vanity or folly or ill-humor would ever touch the grace of those grey squirrels. As for the red ones!—Miss Hazel brought her attention to the inside of the coach for a minute, but the sight gave only colour and no check to her musings. How strange of that particular red squirrel to follow her steps as he had done the other day—to follow her steps now, as she more than half suspected. What did he mean? And what did she mean by her own deportment? Nothing, she declared to herself:—but that red squirrels will bite occasionally. There swept over her, sighing from among the pine trees, the breath of a vague sorrow. In all the emergencies that might come, in all that future progress, also dim with its own blue haze, what was she to do?

Mr. Falkirk could take care of her property,—who could take care of *her?* Deep was the look of her brown eyes, close and controlling the pressure of her lips: the wrist where the three bracelets lay felt the tight grasp of her other hand.

The coach rolled on, through thickening air and darkening sky, air thick also with a smell of smoke which it was odd no one took note of; until the horses trotted round a sudden turn of the road into the very cause of it all. The blue was spotted now with faint red fire; with dull streaks as of beds of coals, and little sharp points of flame. On both sides of the road, creeping among the pines and leaping up into them, the fire was raging. A low sound from Wych Hazel, a sound rather of horror than fear, yet curiously pitiful and heart-stirring, roused both her friends in an instant. Almost at the same instant the coach came to a standstill, and Rollo jumped out.

'What's the matter, Rollo?'

'Fire in the woods, sir. We must turn about; that's all.'

The elder of the two women, who had just waked up, asked with a terrified face, 'if there was any danger?' but nobody answered her. Rollo took his seat again; at the same time the horses' heads came about.

'What are you going to do?' she demanded.

'We are going back a little way. There is fire along the road ahead of us; and the horses might set their feet upon some hot ashes, which wouldn't be good for them.'

'But we're goin' back'ards!—where we come from! Clary, we're goin' back hum!'

'We shall turn again presently,' said Rollo. 'Have patience a few minutes.'

He spoke so calmly, the women were quieted. Mr. Falkirk, however, leaned back no more. He watched the hazy smoke by the roadside; he watched generally; and now and then his eye furtively turned to Wych Hazel. For some little time they travelled back hopefully on their way, though the smoky atmosphere was too thick to let any one forget the obstacle which had turned them. It grew stifling, breathed so long, and it did not clear away; but though every one noticed this, no one spoke of it to his neighbour. Then at last it began to weigh down more heavily upon the forest, and visible puffs and curls in the dense blue suggested that its substance was becoming more palpable.

'Rollo—', said Mr. Falkirk in an undertone.

'Yes!' said the other, just as the coach again came to a sudden stop and a volley of exclamations, smothered and not smothered, sounded from the coach box. Both gentlemen sprang out.

'Good patience!' said the older of the two women, 'it's the fire again! it's all round us!' O I wisht I hadn't a'come! I wisht I was to hum!'—and she showed the earnestness of the wish by beginning to cry. Her companion sat still and turned very pale. Paler yet, but with every nerve braced, Wych Hazel stood in the road to see for herself. The gentlemen were consulting.

The fire had closed in upon the road they had passed over an hour or two before. There it was, smoking, and breathing along, gathering strength every minute; while a low, murmuring roar told of its out-of-sight progress. What was to be done? The driver declared, on being pressed, that a branch road, the Lupin road it was called, was to his knowledge but a little distance before them; a quarter of an hour would reach it.

'Drive on, then,'— said Rollo, turning to put Wych Hazel into the coach.

The man mumbled, that he did not know whether his horses would go through the fire.

'*I* know. They will. We will go straight on. *You* are not afraid,' he said, meeting Hazel's eyes for a moment. It was not more than half a second, but nature's telegraph works well at such instants. Wych Hazel saw an eye steady and clear, which seemed to brave danger and not know confusion. He saw a wistful face, with the society mask thrown by, and only the girl's own childish self remaining.

'Afraid to go on? no,' she said; and then felt a scarcely defined smile that warmed his eyes and brow as he answered, 'There is no need'—and put her into the coach. In both touch and tone there lay a promise; but she had no time to think of it. The coach was moving on again; the women were very frightened, and cried and moaned by way of relieving their feelings at the expense of other people's. Mrs. Saddler, who had hitherto used only her eyes, now clasped her fingers together and fell to the muttering of short prayers over and over under her breath, the urgency of which redoubled when the coach had gone a little further and the fire and smoke began to wreathe thicker on both sides of the road.

'There is no occasion, Mrs. Saddler,' said Mr. Falkirk somewhat sternly. 'Be quiet, and try to show an example of sense to your neighbours.'

'Did you never say your prayers before?' said Rollo turning towards her; they sat on the same seat. He spoke half kindly, half amused, but with that mingled—though ever so slightly—an expression of meaning more pun-

gent ; all together overcame Mrs. Saddler. She burst into a fit of tears, which nervousness made uncontrollable.

'What have I done?' said the young man as the weeping became general at his end of the coach. 'It is dangerous to meddle with edge tools! Come, cheer up! we shall leave all this smoke behind us in a few minutes. You'll see clear directly.'

His tone was so calm the women took courage from it, and ventured to use their eyes again. The stage-coach had left the burning road ; they were going across the woods in another direction ; the air was soon visibly more free of smoke. The driver was hopeful, and sending his horses along at a good pace. The shower within inside dried up ; and Rollo throwing himself back upon the seat gazed steadfastly out of the window. Wych Hazel had gazed at him while he spoke to the others, with a sort of examining curiosity in her brown eyes that was even amused ; but now she became as intent as himself on affairs outside of the coach.

For a while all was quiet. Mrs. Saddler sat in brown stupefaction after having received such rebukes, and no more apples were brought forward on the front seat. The women whispered together and watched their fellow-travellers—Rollo especially. But at length it became evident to the keener observers of the party that the air was thickening again ; the smell of burning woods which filled the air was growing more pungent, the air more warm ; those visible waves of the blue atmosphere began to appear again. Once Mr. Falkirk leaned forward as if to address Rollo ; he thought better of it and fell back without speaking. And on they went. The smell of burning and the thick stifling smoke became very oppressive.

'There is a large tract on fire, Rollo,' Mr. Falkirk remarked at length.

'Probably.'

In another minute the coach halted. Rollo put his head out of the window to speak to the coachman, and the cool tone in which he asked, 'What is it?' Wych Hazel felt at the time and remembered afterwards. The driver's answer was unheard by all but one. Rollo threw himself out.

'Stay where you are,' he said to Mr. Falkirk as he shut the door. 'You keep order and I'll make order.'

He went forward. The coach stood still, with that fearful wreathing of blue vapour thicker and nearer around it. The smell became so strong that the thought forced itself upon every one, they must have come upon the fire again. The women wanted to get out. Mr. Falkirk dissuaded them. Wych Hazel kept absolutely still. In a moment or two Rollo appeared at Mr. Falkirk's side of the coach, and spoke rather low. 'I am going to make explorations. Keep all as you are.'

Mr. Falkirk spoke lower still. 'Is the fire ahead?'

The answer was not in English or French. Looking from her window as far as she could, Wych Hazel now saw Rollo cross the road and make for a tall pine which stood at a little distance. She saw him throw his coat and hat on the ground; then catching one of the long lithe branches he was in a moment off the ground and in the tree; yes, and making determinately for the top of it. The 'red squirrel' had not learnt climbing for nothing; agile, steady, quick, he mounted and mounted. She grew dizzy with looking. Mr. Falkirk had not the same view.

'What's he doing? what are we waiting for? Can you see?' he asked impatiently.

'Yes—they are trying to find out which way to go, sir.'

Mr. Falkirk made a movement as if to get out himself; then checked it, seeing the helpless bevy of women who were dependent on him and now in the utmost perturbation. Standing still tried their nerves. To keep order withinside the coach was as much as he could attend to. Cries and moans and questions of involved incoherency, poured upon him. Would they ever get home? would the fire catch the coach? would it frighten the horses? what were they stopping for?—were some of the simplest inquiries that Mr. Falkirk had to hear and answer; in the midst of which one of the ladies assured herself and him that if 'Isaiah had come along with them they would never have got into such a fix.' Mrs. Saddler Mr. Falkirk peremptorily silenced; the others he soothed as best he might; and all the while Wych Hazel watched the signs without, and followed the climber in the pine tree, following him in his venturesome ascent and descent, which were both made with no lack of daring. He was on the ground at last, swinging himself from the end of a pine branch which he had compelled into his service; he came straight to Mr. Falkirk, heated, but mentally as cool as ever.

'I see our way,' he said, 'I am going on the box myself.' Don't be concerned. I have driven a post-coach in England.'

He looked across to Wych Hazel, as he spoke, and his eye carried the promise again. Wych Hazel met his look, though with no answer in her own; fear, or self-control, or something back of both, made the very lines of her face still; only a sort of shiver of feeling passed over them as he said, 'Don't be concerned.' All

this passes in a second ; then Rollo is on the box with the stage driver and the stage is in motion again. But it is motion straight on to where Wych Hazel has seen that the smoke is thickest. The horses go fast ; they know that another hand has the reins ; the ground is swiftly travelled over. Now the puffs of smoke roll out round and defined from the burning woodland ; and then, above the rattle of wheels and tread of hoofs, is heard another sound,—a spiteful snapping and crackling, faint but increasing. Can the air be borne?—it is hard to breathe ; and flame, yes, flame is leaping from the dried leaves and curling out here and there from a tree. Mrs. Saddler put her head out of the coach.

'Oh, sir!' she shrieked, 'he is taking us right into it! O stop him! we'll be burned, sure! it's all fire—it's all fire!'

The chorus of shrieks became now almost a worse storm within than the tempest of fire which was raging without. The women were wild. It was an awful moment for everybody. The fire had full possession on both sides of the road, viciously sparkling and crackling and throwing out jets of flames and volumes of smoke, threatening to dispute the way with the stage coach ; yet through it lay the only way to safety. It could not be borne long ; the horses, urged by a hand that knew how to apply all means of stimulus and spared none, drew the coach along at a furious speed. The speed alone was distracting to the poor women, who had never known the like ; the coach seemed to them, doubtless, hastening to destruction. Their shrieks were uncontrollable ; and indeed no topics of comfort could be urged, when manifestly they were fleeing for their lives from the fire, and the fire on every side, before and behind them,

was threatening with fearful assertion of power that they should not escape. How swiftly thoughts careered through the mind of the one silent member of the company—thoughts like those quick flashes of flame, those dark curls of smoke. The questions she had been debating two hours before—were they all to have one short, sharp answer?—And what would become of her then? Were such days as the one before yesterday forever ended? How would it feel to be caught and wreathed about like one of those pines—how would Mr. Rollo feel to see it—and what if all the rest should be dead, there in the fire, and she only half dead; together with a strange impatience to know the worst and endure the worst. She had drawn back a little from the window, driven in by the scorching air, but looked out still with both hands up to shield her eyes. She did not know into what pitiful lines her mouth had shaped itself, nor what faintness and sickness were creeping over her with every breath of that smoke. The time was, after all, not long; but in the thickest of the fire, when the smoke literally choked up the way before the horses' eyes, the animals suddenly stopped; from a furious speed, the coach came to a blank stand-still. A voice was heard from the coach-box cheering the horses—but the dead pause continued. And now when the rattle of the wheels ceased, the sweep of the fiery storm could be heard and felt. A wind had risen, or more likely was created by the great draught of the fire; and its rush through the woods, driving the flames before it, and catching up the clouds of smoke to pile them upon the faces and throats of the travellers was with a hiss and a fury and a blinding which came like the malice of a spiteful thing. It was almost impossible to breathe; and yet the coach stood

still! A half-minute seemed the growth of a year. The women became frantic; Mr. Falkirk kept them in the coach by the sheer exertion of force. Wych Hazel in vain strained her eyes to see through the smoke what the detaining cause was.

The horses had been scared at last by the fire crackling and snapping in their faces, and confounded by the clouds of smoke. Bewildered, they had stopped short; and voice and whip were powerless against fear. That was a moment never to be forgotten, at least by those withinside the stage-coach, who could do nothing but wait and scream.

'Hush! the horses are frightened: that is all,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'He's——what's he doing, Wych?—yes, he's blinding the leaders; that's it. There!'

The intense anxiety which was smothered in every one of these words, Wych Hazel long remembered. They saw, as he spoke, they could see Rollo at the horse's heads, going from one to the other; they saw him dimly through the smoke; they caught the light of something white in his hand. Mr. Falkirk had guessed right. Then they saw Rollo throw himself postillion-wise upon one of the leaders. In another moment the coach moved, doubtfully; then amid the rush and roar they could hear the cheer of their charioteer's voice, and the frightened animals plunged on again. Presently, encouraged perhaps by a little opening in the smoke, they dashed forward as heartily as ever, and—yes—the smoke was less thick and the air less dark, and momentarily brightening. The worst was over. Surely the worst was over, but the travellers drew breath if freer yet fearfully, till the lessening cloud and disappearing fire and stillness in the woods, said they had left the danger be

hind. Black charred stems and branches began to show what had been where they now were; little puffs of grey smoke from half consumed tufts of moss and old stumps of great trees were all that was left of the army of fire that had marched that way.

The horses were brought back to a moderate going. A quieting of the storm within accompanied the passing away of the storm without. Fairly overcome now, dizzy besides with the almost flaming current which had blown full against her in that last charge through the fire, Wych Hazel drooped her head lower and lower till it rested on the sill of the window; but no one marked just then. The women were drying their eyes and uttering little jets of excited or thankful exclamation. Mr. Falkirk watched from his window what was to be done next.

'We'll have to put up, if it *be* onconvenient,' said the driver. 'Can't ask a team to do *more'n* that at a time, sir. 'Tain't no tavern, neither—but there's Siah Sullivan's; he's got fodder, and food, allays, for a friend in need.'

'How far is Lupin?' called out Mr. Falkirk. 'Aren't we on the Lupin road?'

'Na—it's a good bit 'tother side o' that 'ere flamin' pandemony, sir, Lupin's.'

'No it isn't! I mean Lupin, where Braddock's mill used to be—old John Braddock's.'

'Taint called Lupin now,' observed the driver,—'that ere's West Lupinus. Wal—John Braddock's there now; it's four or five mile straight ahead.'

'We can go there,' said Rollo. 'That will give us the best chance.'

Gently they took those three or four miles. The open

country to which they soon came, getting out of the woods, looked very lovely and peaceful to them ; the fire had not been there, and quiet sunshine lay along the fields. In the last mile or two the fields gave place again to broken country ; a brawling stream was heard and seen by intervals, black and chafing over a rocky bed. Then the road descended sharply, among thick leafage, fresh and fair, not pine needles ; and finally at the bottom of the descent the stage stopped.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MILL FLOOR.

THE place was a dell in the woods, the bottom filled with a dark, clear little lake. At the lower end of it stood the mill ; picturesque enough under the trees, with its great doors opening upon the lake. On the floor within could be seen the bags of flour and grain piled about, and the miller passing to and fro. It was deeply still ; the light came cool and green through the oaks and maples and ashes ; the trickling of water was heard. Dark slept the little lake, overshadowed by the leafy banks which shut it in ; the only chief spot of light was the miller's open door, where the sunbeams lit up his bags and him ; the mill-stream brawled away somewhere below, and beyond the mill the road curled away out of sight to mount the hill again. This was Braddock's mill.

Mr. Falkirk got out, and then Mr. Rollo helped out the women and Mrs. Saddler, who was confused out of all her proprieties, for she pushed before her young lady ; finally Wych Hazel.

'How do you do?' said he, scanning her.

Apparently the dizziness had not gone off, for she raised her head and came out of the coach in the slow-

est and most mechanical way, lifting her hand and pushing back her hair with a weary sort of gesture as he spoke. So weary her face was, so utterly subdued, it might have touched anybody to see it. It never seemed to occur to her that the question needed an answer.

'Your best chance is the mill,' said he; 'I think you can rest there. At any rate, it is your chance.'

He put her hand upon his arm and led her down the few steps of rocky way to the mill door. Mr. Falkirk followed. The women had paired off to seek the miller's house, out of sight above on the bank. Only Mrs. Saddler came after Mr. Falkirk.

The mill floor was large, cool and clean; that is, in the shade, and with the exception of the dust of flour on everything. Mr. Falkirk entered into explanations with the miller; while Rollo, after a brief word of leave-asking, proceeded to arrange a pile of grain bags so as to form an extempore divan. Harder might be; and over it he spread the gentlemen's linen dusters and all the travelling shawls of the party; and upon it then softly placed Wych Hazel. Poor child! she was used to cushions, and in need of them, from the way she dropped down among these. She had thrown off her hat, and Mr. Falkirk stopped and unfastened her mantle, and softly began to pull off one of her gloves; the miller's daughter, a fair, plump, yellow-haired damsel, coming out from among the grain bins, began upon the other.

'What's happened here?' said she, pityingly.

'Have you anything this lady could eat; was the counter question. 'She is exhausted; fire in the woods drove us out of the way.'

'Do tell! I heard say the woods was all afire. Why there's enough in the house, but it ain't here. We live

up the hill a ways. I'll start and fetch something—only say what. O here's this, if she's fainted.'—And producing a very amulet-looking bottle of salts, suspended round her neck by a blue ribband, she at once administered a pretty powerful whiff. With great suddenness Wych Hazel laid hold of the little smelling bottle, opening her brown eyes to their fullest extent and exclaiming:

'What in the world are you all about!'

'Ah!' said Mr. Falkirk. 'Get what you can my good girl; only don't stand about it. Can you give her a glass of milk? or a cup of tea?'

The girl left them and sprang away up the path at a rate that showed her good will, followed by Rollo. Arrived at the miller's house, which proved a poor little affair, the cup of tea was hastily brewed; and Rollo having contrived to find out pretty well the resources of the family in that as well as in other lines of accommodation, and having despatched along with the tea whatever he thought might stand least chance of being refused, left the miller's daughter to convey it, and betook himself to his own amusements.

The meal was not much. But when it was over Wych Hazel found a better refreshment and one even more needed just then. Mrs. Saddler at a little distance nodded and dreamed; Mr. Falkirk also had moved off and at least made believe rest. Then did his ward take the comfort, a rare one to her, of pouring out a mindful to somebody of her own sex and age. It was only to the little miller's daughter; yet the true honest face and rapt attention made amends for all want of conventionalities.

'What did you get that salts for?' she began.

'He said you was faint.'

'Who is "he"?'

'The gentleman—I mean the young one.'

'Ah—Well, but I was holding you down by the blue ribband for ever so long.'

'Yes—because—I had promised not to take it off,' said the girl, blushing.

'What a promise?'

'O, but you know, ma'am—I mean, it was give to me, and so I promised. When folks give you things they always expect you never to take 'em off.'

'Do they?' said Wych Hazel. But then she launched forth into the account of all the day's distress, electrifying her listener with some of the fear and excitement so long pent up. Yet the mill girl's comment was peculiar.

'It does make a person feel very solemn to be so near to death.'

'Solemn!' cried Wych Hazel. 'Is *that* all you would feel, Phœbe?'

'I'm not much afraid of pain, you know, ma'am—and if the fire took it couldn't last long.'

'But Phœbe;—' she sat straight up on her floury cushions, looking at the girl's quiet face. 'What do you mean, Phœbe?'—She could not have told what checked the expression of her growing wonder.

'O lie down, ma'am, please! Why I only mean,' said Phœbe speaking with perfect simplicity—'You know God calls us all to die somehow—and if he called me to die so, it wouldn't make much difference. I shouldn't think of it when I'd got to heaven.'

Again some undefined feeling sealed Wych Hazel's lips. She lay down as she was desired, and with her

hand over her eyes thought, and wondered, and fell asleep.

For some hours thereafter the sunbeams were hardly quieter than the party they lighted on the miller's floor. Wych Hazel slept; Mrs. Saddler was even more profoundly wrapped in forgetfulness; Mr. Falkirk sat by keeping guard. The miller's daughter had run up the hill to her home for a space. As to Rollo, he had not been seen. His gun was his companion, and with that it was usual for him to be in the woods much of the time. He came back from his wanderings however as the day began to fall, and now sat on a stone outside the mill door, very busy. The little lake at his feet still and dark, with the side of the woody glen doubled in its mirror, and the sunlight in the tops of the trees reflected in golden glitter from the middle of the pool, was a picture to tempt the eye: but Rollo's eye, if it glanced, came back again. He was picking the feathers from a bird he had shot, and doing it deftly. Sauntering leisurely up the miller approached him.

'Now that's what I like,' he remarked; 'up to anything, eh? You don't seem so much used up as the rest on 'em. Even the little one talked herself to sleep at last!'

'Have you got a match, Mr. Miller?'

'No—I haven't,' said the man of flour—'I always light my pipe with a burning glass. Won't that serve your turn? So there she sits, asleep, and my Phœbe sits and looks at her.'

'I've something else that will serve my turn,' said the hunter applying to his gun. 'But stay—I do not care to see any more fire to-day than is necessary.'—And drawing his work off to a safe place, he went on to

kindle tinder and make a nice little fire.—'Haven't you learned how to make bread yet, Mr. Miller?'

'Not a bit!' said he laughing. 'And when you've got a wife and four daughters you won't do much fancy cookig neither, I guess. But there's Phœbe—'

'A mistake, Mr. Miller,' said the fancy cook. 'Best always to be independent of your wife—and of everything else.'

And impaling his bird on a sharp splinter he stuck it up before the fire, to the great interest and amusement of the miller. Another spectator also wandered out there, and she was presently sent back to the mill.

'Miss Hazel,' said Mrs. Saddler, coming to the 'divan' where the young lady and her guardian were both sitting,—'Mr. Rollo says, ma'am, are you ready for him to come in?'

'I am awake, if that is what he means.'

'What do you mean, Mrs. Saddler?'

'If you please, sir, I am sure I don't know what I mean,—but that's a very strange gentleman, Miss Kennedy. There he's gone and shot a robin—at least, I suppose it was him for I don't know who else should have done it—and his gun's standing by—and then he's gone and picked it ma'am—picked the feathers off, and they 're lyin' all round; and then he washed it in the lake, and he was hard to suit, for he walked a good way up the lake before he found a place where he *would* wash it; and now he's made a fire and stuck up the bird and roasted it; and why he didn't get me or Miss Miller to do it I don't comprehend. And he's got plates and things, ma'am, and salt, ma'am, and bread; and that's what *he* means, sir; and he want's to know if you're ready. The bird's all done.'

Wych Hazel looked anything but ready. She was very young in the world's ways, very new to her own popularity, and somehow Mrs. Saddler's story touched her sensitiveness. The shy, shrinking colour and look told of what at six years old would have made her hide her face under her mother's apron. No such refuge being at hand, however, and she obliged to face the world for herself, as soon as she had despatched a very dignified message to Mr. Rollo, the young lady's feeling sought relief in irritation.

'I suppose *I* am not to blame this time, for making myself conspicuous, sir! Have you given me up as a bad bargain, Mr. Falkirk?'

'It can't be helped, my dear,'—said her guardian somewhat dryly, and soberly too. 'I think however it is rather somebody else who is making himself conspicuous at this time.'

He became conspicuous to their vision a minute after, appearing in the mill door-way with a little dish in his hand and attended by Phœbe with other appliances; but nothing mortal could less justify Wych Hazel's sensation of shyness. With the coolness of a traveller, the readiness of a hunter, and the business attention of a cook or a courier, both which offices he had been filling, he went about his arrangements. The single chair that was in the mill was taken from Mr. Falkirk and brought up to do duty as a table, with a board laid upon it. On this board was set the bird, hot and savoury, on its blue-edged dish; another plate with bread and salt, and a glass of water; together with a very original knife and fork, that were probably introduced soon after the savages 'left.' Mrs. Saddler's eyes grew big as she looked; but Rollo and the

miller's girl understood each other perfectly and wanted none of her help. Well——

'Girls blush sometimes because they are alive'—but seeing it could not be helped, as Mr. Falkirk had said, Wych Hazel rallied whatever of her was grown up, and tried to do justice to both the cooking and the compliment. The extreme gravity and propriety of her demeanour were a little suspicious to one who knew her well, and there could be no sort of question as to the prettiest possible curl which now and then betrayed itself at the corners of her mouth; but Miss Kennedy had herself remarkably in hand, and talked as demurely from behind the breast-bone of her robin as if it had been a small mountain ridge. Mr. Falkirk looked on.

'Where did you find that, Rollo?'

'Somewhere within a mile of circuit, sir,' said Rollo, who had taken a position of ease in the mill doorway, half lying on the floor, and looking out on the lake.

'You are a good provider.'

'Might have had fish—if my tackle had not been out of reach. I did manage to pick up a second course, though —— Miss Phœbe, I think it is time for the second course ——'

His action, at least, Phœbe understood, if not his words; for as he sprang up and cleared the board of the relics of the robin, the miller's daughter, looking as if the whole thing was a play, brought out from some crib a large platter of wild strawberries bordered with vine leaves; along with some bowls of very good looking milk.

'Upon my word, Rollo!'—said the other gentleman.

'Ah, that touches you, Mr. Falkirk! You don't

deserve it—but you may have some. And I will be generous—Mr. Falkirk, here is a wing of the robin.'

'No, thank you,' said the other, laughing. 'Why these are fine!'

'Is the air fine out of doors, Mr. Rollo?' asked the young lady.

'Nothing can be finer.'

'What you call "strong," sir?'

'Strong as a rose—or as a lark's whistle—or as June sunlight; strong in a gentle way; I don't admire things that are *too* strong.'

'Things that you think ought to be weak. But I was trying to find out whether your private collation of air could have taken away your appetite.'

'I think not—I haven't inquired after it, but now that you speak of the matter, I think it must have been bread and cheese.'

'And I suppose you tried the strawberries—just to see if they were ripe.'

'No, I didn't, but I will now.' And coming to Wych Hazel's side he proceeded to help her carefully and to put a bowl of milk in suggestive proximity to her right hand; then taking a handful himself he stood up and went on talking to Mr. Falkirk.

'What is your plan of proceeding, sir?'

'I don't know,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'I am puzzled. The coach goes back to-morrow morning to the foot of the mountain; there is no object in our making such a circuit, if we could get on from here,—besides the fact that none of us want to go over the ground again; but to get on from here seems out of the question.'

'It seems to me, to stay here is out of the question,' observed Rollo.

'I don't see how to help it—for one night. The only sole vehicle here is Mr. Miller's little wagon, and that will hold but two.'

'So I understand.—Those strawberries are not bad,' he said, appealing to Wych Hazel.

'A very mild form of praise, Mr. Rollo. Harmless and inoffensive—to berries. What will you do, then, Mr. Falkirk? seeing there are five of us.'

'I am in a strait. Could you spend the night here in any tolerable comfort, Wych, do you suppose?'

'I am at a loss to understand your system of arithmetic,' observed Rollo.

'Simple addition. I suppose, sir, I could spend the night where other human creatures can. And as I shall take Phœbe with me when I go, will you please arrange with her father? I told her she could have what wages she liked.'

'What shall I arrange with her father, Miss Hazel?'

'Why—anything he wants arranged, sir. What the wages shall be.'

'Your scheme of travel may be continued to any extent, Miss Hazel, if you continue to do business on an equally logical plan.'

She laughed, a good, honest, merry little laugh, but further direct reply made none.

'That puff of displeasure blows me fairly away!' she said, jumping up and floating off to the mill door like any thistle down, on the tips of her toes.

'Is it possible to make any comfortable arrangement for her at the miller's house?' Mr. Falkirk asked in a low tone.

'Not if she be "true princess," said Rollo with a smile. 'There would be more than a few vegetables

between Miss Kennedy and comfort.'——He hesitated, and then suddenly asked Wych if she were tired? Certainly her face told of some fatigue, but the busy spirit was unconquered, and she said, 'No—not very much.'

'I am going on to Dr. Maryland's myself—with the miller's horse and wagon, which I engaged provisionally. If Miss Kennedy will trust herself to me—perhaps it would be less wearisome than to stay here; and it would make a jubilee at Dr. Maryland's as you know, sir. I will send the wagon back for you to-morrow, in that case.'

'It is for her to say!' Mr. Falkirk answered, rather gloomily. 'It is a day of adventures, Wych—will you go to meet them, or will you wait for them? There's no escape either way.' He smiled a little at his ward as he spoke. But her eyes spoke back only amazement.

'I shall stay with you, sir, of course.' Clearly Miss Kennedy thought her guardian had taken leave of his senses.

'What if you take the wagon to Dr. Maryland's then, sir; Miss Kennedy can hardly spend the night here. Even a twenty-five mile drive is better.'

But Mr. Falkirk had reasons of his own for negativing that plan, and negatived it accordingly.

'Go with me, then' said Rollo, turning to Wych Hazel. 'I will take care of you!' And he said it with something of the warm smile which had met her before, power and promise together.

'Why, I'm not afraid,' she said, half laughing, yet half shyly too; thinking with herself how strange the day had been. Since until yesterday Mr. Rollo had scarcely paid her ordinary attention; since until then Mr. Falkirk had always been the one to care for her

so carefully. She felt oddly alone, standing there by them both, looking out with her great brown eyes steadily into the setting sunshine ; and a wistful air of thought-taking replaced the smile. Rollo remarked that there was but one unoccupied bed in the miller's house, and that one, he knew, was laid upon butternuts.

Mr. Falkirk had been watching his ward. He drew near, and put her hand upon his arm, looking and speaking with grave tenderness.

'You shall do as you list, my dear ; I cannot advise you, for I do not know which would be worse, the fatigue of going or the fatigue of staying. You must judge. Dr. Maryland will receive you as his own child, if you go ;—and I will keep you as my own child if you stay, he added after a second's hesitation.

'Yes, sir—I know—I think I shall stay. I don't think I can go, Mr. Rollo ; and as for the butternuts,' she added, recovering her spirits the moment the decision was made, 'any one who likes to sleep on them may! I shall play mouse among the meal bags.'

'Then I will do what I can to get you out of your difficulties to-morrow. I hope the play will not include sleeplessness, which is my idea of a mouse.'

He offered his hand, clasped hers, lifted his hat, and was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

CATS.

WITH the departure of the more stirring member of the company, Miss Wych had subsided; and in that state could feel that she was tired. She sat in the doorway of the mill. It was after sundown; still, bright, sweet, and fair, as after sundown in June can be. The sky all aglow still with cooler lights; in the depth of the hollow the morsel of a lake had a dark shining of its own, like a black diamond, or a green jasper, with the light off. Mrs. Saddler was gone up the hill with Phœbe, to get her share of hospitality. Mr. Falkirk had supped on the remains of the strawberries and milk, and would have nothing more. Guardian and ward were alone. The stillness of Summer air floated down from the tree-tops, and did not stir the lake.

'Wych, how do you like seeking your fortune? I am curious to be informed?'

'Thank you, sir. The finding to-day has gone so far beyond my expectations, that I am willing to rest the pursuit till to-morrow.'

'Fortune and you clasp hands rather roughly at first

setting out! But what do you think of the train she has brought with her in these seven days?'

'What train, sir?'

'I asked you what you thought of it. Answer straight, like a good child.'

'It's a wonderful train, if it has made a good child of me,' she answered, with a half laugh. 'Do you mean of people, or events, sir?'

'The events are left behind, child; the people follow.

'Will they?' said Wych Hazel. 'Dr. Maryland and all? Mr. Kingsland might stay behind. Nobody will ever want him.'

'All the rest have your good leave!' said Mr. Falkirk, with an expression—Wych could not tell what sort of an expression, it was so comp.icated. 'Do you think it is an easy office I have to fill?' he went on.

'Maybe not, sir. I thought you seemed very ready to give it up. I have felt like stray baggage to-day.'

'How do you suppose I am to guard you from so many enemies?'

'Ready to send me round the country, with the first knight-errant that starts up?' said the girl, in an aggrieved voice. 'And if *I* had proposed such a thing!'

'My dear,' said Mr. Falkirk, 'you would have been perfectly safe at Dr. Maryland's. And much better off than in this old mill. I am not sure but I ought to have made you go.'

'What did you mean by "enemies," just now, Mr. Falkirk?'

'There's an old proverb,' said Mr. Falkirk with a quirl of his lips, 'that "a cat may look at a king." And no doubt it is a queen's liability. But how am I to guard you from the teeth and the claws?'

'My dear sir, very few cats are dangerous. I am not much afraid of being scratched.'

'Have you any idea how many of your grimalkins are coming to Chickaree this Summer?'

'No, sir. The more the better; for then they will have full occupation for their claws without me.'

'Ah, my dear,' said Mr. Falkirk, 'don't you know that the cat gets within springing distance before the claws are shown?'

'Yes, sir; but you are presupposing a stationary mouse. Pray, how many fierce, soft-pawed, sharp-clawed monsters preside over your ideas at present?'

'Six or seven,' said Mr. Falkirk with the utmost gravity. 'Fortune has come upon you suddenly, Wych.'

It was very pretty, the way she laughed and flushed.

'They are not all troubled with whiskers, sir—my kind medical friend, for instance.'

'You think so! Pray, in your judgment, what is he, then?'

'Not a cat, sir, and yet no lion. Mr. Rollo calls him a "specimen."'

'Of what?' (dryly enough.)

'I rebuked him for the expression, sir, but did not inquire its meaning.'

'Do you suppose the English traveller, Mr. Shenstone, will come to Chickaree this Summer for the purpose of inspecting the Morton manufactories?'

'Let us 'ope not, sir. Mr. Morton will, for his home is just there. He told me so.'

'And young Nightingale has it in his mind to spend a good deal of the Summer at his aunt's, Mrs. Lasalle's; for he told me so. I saw him in town.'

'Mr. Falkirk, you are not a bit like yourself to-day. Are all men cats, sir?' (very gravely.)

'My dear,' said Mr. Falkirk, 'most men are, when they see a Chickaree mouse in their path!'

'Poor little me!' said Wych Hazel, laughing. She was silent a minute, then went cheerfully on. 'I know, Mr. Falkirk, I shall depend upon you! We're in a fairy tale, you remember, sir, and you must be the three dogs.'

'Will you trust me, Wych, when I take such a shape to your eyes?'

'Do you remember?' said she, not heeding. 'The first one with eyes like saucers, looking—so! And the next with eyes like mill wheels—so! And the next, with eyes like the full moon!—' At which point Miss Hazel's own eyes were worth looking at.

'You do not answer me, I observe. Never mind. A woman's understanding, I have frequently observed, develops like a prophecy.'

The night in the mill was better, on the whole, than it promised. No sound awoke Wych Hazel, till little messengers of light came stealing through every crack and knot hole of the mill, and a many-toed Dorking near by had six times proclaimed himself the first cock in creation, let the other be who he would!

To open her eyes was to be awake, with Wych Hazel; and softly she stepped along the floor and out on the dewy path to the lake side; and there stood splashing her hands in the water and the water over her face, with intense satisfaction. The lake was perfectly still, disturbed only by the dip of a king-fisher or the spring of a trout. She stood there musing over the last day and the last week, starting various profound questions, but not stopping to run them down,—then went meandering back to the mill again. On her way she came to a spot in the

grass where there was a sprinkling of robin's feathers. Wych Hazel stopped short looking at them, smiling to herself, then suddenly stopped and chose out three or four; and went back with quick steps to the mill.

Bread and tea were had in the open air, with the seasoning of the June morning. The stage coach rumbled off by the road it had come, bearing with it the two countrywomen, and leaving a pile of baggage for Chickaree. The miller came down and set his mill agoing, excusing himself to his guests by saying that there was a good lot of corn to be ground and the people would be along for it. So the mill became no longer a place of rest, and Miss Hazel and her guardian were driven out into the woods by the rumble and dust and jar of machinery. Do what they would, it was a long morning to twelve o'clock; when the mill ceased its rumble and the miller went home to his dinner, and the weary and warm loiterers came back to the shade of the mill floor. Then the sound of wheels was heard at last; the first that had broken the solitude that day; and presently at the mill door Rollo presented himself, looking as if sunshine agreed with him. He shook hands with Mr. Falkirk, but gave Wych Hazel his old stately salutation.

'I could not come sooner,' he said. 'I did my best; but it is thirty miles instead of twenty-five. How was the night?'

'Sadly oblivious and uneventful!'

'Mine wasn't! for I was getting dinner for you in my dreams all night long. Being dependent on other people's resources, you see—However, I had a good little friend to help me!'

'What carriage have you brought for us, Rollo?'

'Dr. Maryland's rockaway, sir; and the miller's wagon

for the trunks. To get anything else would have made much more delay. Is my friend Phœbe here?'

'She will be soon. It is dinner-time in the mill. What do you want, Mr. Rollo?'

'Three words and a little assistance.'

He went off, and in a little while was back again, accompanied by Phœbe and plates and glasses; and the two went on to set forth the dinner, which he drew from a great basket that had come in the rockaway. All this was done, and order given at the same time to other matters, with the light-handed promptitude and readiness of the bird-roasting of yesterday; Rollo assuring Wych Hazel between whiles that travelling was a very good thing, if you took enough of it.

'Thirty miles this morning, and thirty last night; and how many yesterday morning?—A hundred, I should say, by my measurement.'

'Rollo!—What a dinner you have brought us!' said Mr. Falkirk, who maintained a quiet and passive behaviour.

'You cannot set off for some hours yet, sir—the horses must have rest. I believe—but am not sure—that somebody got up very early this morning to make that pie. I told them I had left some friends in distress; and Primrose and I—did what we could. I realized this morning what must be the position of a Commissary General on a rapid march.'

The provision on the board called for no excuses. Rollo served everybody, even Mrs. Saddler, and afterwards dispensed strawberries of much larger growth than those of the day before. He was the impersonation of gay activity as long as there was anything to do; and then he subsided into ease-taking. The smoke of

a cigar did not indeed offend Miss Kennedy's mill-door; but in a luxurious position under a tree at some distance the sometime smoker settled himself with his sketch-book, and seemed to be comfortably busy at play, till it was time for moving.

Wych Hazel had been in an altogether quiet mood since the arrival of the rockaway. In that mood she had watched the unpacking of the basket, in that mood she had eaten her dinner. It was strange, even to herself, the sort of quietus Mr. Rollo was to her. Not feeling free to play with him, by no means disposed to play before him, she had ventured to offer her services no further than by asking him what he wanted; then left him to himself; oddly conscious all the while, that if it had been any other one of her new feline friends, she would have put her little hand into the business and the basket with pleasant effect. So she sat still and watched him, —giving a bit of a smile now and then indeed to his direct remarks, but as often only a fuller look of the brown eyes. Since the gentleman had been under the tree she had been idly busy with her own thoughts, having sketched herself tired in the morning. "Prim" she recognized at once—Dr. Maryland's sister,—she had heard him speak of her. Would she be a friend? any one to whom these many thoughts might come out? So Wych Hazel sat, gazing out upon the lengthening shadows, leaning her head somewhat wearily in her hand, wishing the journey over and herself on her own vantage ground at Chickaree. It would be such a help to be mistress of the house!—for these last two days she had been nothing but a brown parcel, marked "fragile"—"with care."

CHAPTER X.

CHICKAREE.

ROLLO had driven the rockaway down and was going to drive back. He put Wych Hazel into the carriage, recommending to her to lean back in the corner and go to sleep. Phœbe was given the place beside her; Mr. Falkirk mounted to the front seat; and off they drove.

It was about four o'clock of a fine June day, and the air was good to breathe; but the way was nothing extraordinary. A pleasant country, nothing more; easy roads for an hour, then heavier travelling.

The afternoon wore on; the miles were plodded over; as the sun was dipping towards the western horizon they came into scenery of a new quality. At once more wild and more dressed; the ground bolder and more rocky in parts, but between filled with gentler indications. The rockaway drew up. The driver looked back into the carriage, while the other gentleman got down.

'Miss Kennedy, if you will change places with Mr. Falkirk now you will be rewarded. I have something here a great deal better than that book.'

'I have not been reading—I have been watching for landmarks for some time,' she said, as she made the

change ; 'but I think I can never have gone to Chickaree by this road.'

The change was great. However fair it had looked from withinside, as soon as she got out on the front seat Wych Hazel found that a flood of bright, slant sunbeams were searching out all the beauty there was in the land, and winning it into view. It was one of those illuminated hours, that are to the common day as an old painted and jewelled missal to an ordinary black letter.

'Is it better than your book?' said the charioteer, whose reins were clearly only play to him, and who was much more occupied with his companion. She glanced round at him, with the very June evening in her eyes, dews and sunbeams and all.

'Better than most of the books that ever were written, I suppose. But the book was not bad, Mr. Rollo.'

'What book was it? to be mentioned in the connection.'

'"I Promessi Sposi."'

'Unknown to me. Give me an idea of it—while we are getting up this hill—there'll be something else to talk of afterwards.'

'Two people are betrothed, and proceed to get into all manner of difficulties. That is the principal idea so far. I haven't come to the turn of the story, which takes the thread out of its tangle.'

'A very stupid idea! Yet you said the book was not a bad book?' he said, looking gravely round upon her.

'No, indeed. And the idea is not stupid, in the book I mean, because the people could not help themselves, and so you get interested for them.'

'Do you get interested in people who cannot help themselves?'

'Yes, I think so—always,—people who *cannot* in the impossible sense. Not those who don't know or wont try. But my words did not mean just that. I should have said, help *it*—help being in difficulties.'

'I believe people can get out of difficulties,' said Rollo. 'What was the matter with these?'

'O the difficulties were piled on their heads by other people. Lucia was a peasant, but she was "si bella" that one of the grandees wanted to get her away from Renzo.'

'I don't see the difficulties yet. What next?'

'No, of course you don't!' said Wych, warming in defense of her book. 'But if some Don Rodrigo forbade somebody to marry *you*—and then sent a party to run away with your bride—so that she had to go into a convent and you wander round the world in ill humour—I daresay your clearness of vision would improve.'

'I dare say it would,' said Rollo, passing a hand over his eyes,—'I think it would have to grow worse before all those events could happen! But on the highest round of that ladder of impossibilities, I think I should see my way into the convent,—and escape the ill humour.'

'But Lucia would not be shut up from you, but from the grandee. It would only make matters worse to bring her out.'

'Not for me,' said Rollo. 'It might for the book, because, as you say, then the interest would be gone. Do you think the people in a book are real people?—while you are reading it?'

'Not quite—they might have been real. I don't feel just as if I should if I knew they were.'

'In that case the interest would be less?' he said, with a laughing look.

'Yes—or at least different. There are so many things to qualify your interest in real living people.'

'Yes. For instance in real life the people who cannot help being in difficulties never interest me as much as the people who get out of them; and so I think most novels are stupid, because the men and women are all real to me. There!' he said, pulling up as they reached the top of an ascent, 'there are no difficulties in your way here. What do you think of that?'

The hill-top gave a wide view over a rich, cultivated, inhabited country; its beauty was in the wide, generous eye-view and the painter's colours that decked it; for which, broken ground in front and distant low hills gave play to the slant sunbeams. Warm, rich, inviting, looked every inch of those wide-spread square miles.

'Do you know where you are?' said he in an enjoying tone.

'I suppose near home,—but it's not familiar yet.'

'No, you are some miles from home. Over there to the west, lies Dr. Maryland's—but you can't see it in this light. It's two miles away. Do you see, further to the north, standing high on a hill, a white house-front that catches the sun?'

'Yes.'

'Mme. Lasalle's, Moscheloo. It's a pretty place—nothing like Chickaree. When we reach the next turning you will catch a glimpse of Crocus in the other direction—do you know what Crocus is?'

'O yes, the village. Our house was brown, I remember that,—and as you go up the hill Mr. Falkirk's cottage is just by the roadside. Did you tell them to leave Mrs. Saddler there?'

'She will tell them herself, I fancy. Crocus is the place where you will be expected to buy sugar and spice. It is some four miles from Chickaree on that side, and we are about five miles from it on this ;' and as he spoke he set the horses in motion. 'I sent on a rescript to Mrs. Bywank, bidding her on her peril to be in order to receive you this evening. Mrs. Bywank and I are old acquaintances,' he said, looking at Wych Hazel.

'Dear Mrs. Bywank ! how good she used to be. I haven't seen her but once since I left home. I'm sure you have a great many worse acquaintances, Mr. Rollo.'

'I am at a loss to understand how you can be sure of that. But I have some better.—Miss Kennedy, I want you to give me a boon. Say you will do it.'

'I'll hear it first.'

'Will you? that's fair, I suppose ; but if we were better friends, I should not be satisfied without a blank check put into my hands for me to fill up. However,—as I am not to have that honour on the present occasion I will explain. Let me be the one to introduce you, some day, to one of your neighbours, whom you do not remember, because she came here since you went away. Will you?'

'Why yes, of course, if you wish it— only I will not be responsible for any accidental introduction that may take place first.'

'I will,' said Rollo. 'Then it is a bargain? I shall ask half a day's excursion for it.'

'That is as much of a supplement as a woman's postscript, Mr. Rollo. However, I suppose it is safe to let you ask what you like.'

'You give it to me ?'

'Maybe.'

'Then it is a bargain,' said he, smiling. 'Here is my hand upon it.'

She laughed, looked round at him rather wonderingly, but gave her hand, remarking:

'But you know I have the right to change my mind three times.'

There is a curious language in the touch of hands, saying often inexplicably what the coarser medium of words would be powerless to say; revealing things not meant to be discovered; and also conveying sweeter, finer, more intimate touches of feeling and mood than tongue could tell if it tried. Wych Hazel remembered this clasp of her hand, and felt it as often as she remembered it. There was nothing sentimental; it was only a frank clasp, in which her hand for a moment was not her own; and though the clasp did not linger, for that second's continuance it gave her an indescribable impression, she could hardly have told of what. It was not merely the gentleness; she could not separate from that the notion of possession, and of both as being in the mind, to which the hand was an index. But such a thought passes as it comes. Something else in those five minutes brought the colour flitting about her face, coming and going as if ashamed of itself; but with it all she was intensely amused; *she* was not sentimental, nor even serious, and the girlish light heart danced a *pas seul* to such a medley of tunes that it was a wonder how she could keep step with them all.

'What do you expect to see at Chickaree?'

'Birds, trees, and horses, and—Mr. Falkirk, didn't you say there would be cats?'

'Let him alone—he is deep in your book,' said Rollo, as Mr. Falkirk made some astonished response. I

meant, what do you remember of the place? we are almost at the gate.'

'I'll tell you—nothing yet. Ah!'—

Through some lapse in the dense woodland there gleamed upon them as they swept on, the top of an old tower where the sunbeams lay at rest; and from the top, its white staff glittering with light, floated the heavy folds of a deep blue flag, not at rest there, but curling and waving and shaking out their white device, which was however too far off to be distinguished. She had said she would tell him, but she never spoke; after that one little cry, so full of tears and laughter, he heard nothing but one or two sobs, low and choked down. Now the lodge, nestling like an acorn under a great oak tree, came in sight first, then the massive piers of the gate. The gate was wide open, but while the little undergrowth of children started up and took possession of window and door and roadside, the gate was held by the head of the house, a sturdy, middle aged American. Wych Hazel had leaned out, watching the children; but as the carriage turned through the gateway, and she saw this man, standing there uncovered, caught the working of his brown weatherbeaten face, she bowed her head indeed, in answer to his low salutation, but then dropped her face in her hands in a perfect passion of weeping. It came and went like a Summer storm, and again she was looking intently. Now past Mr. Falkirk's white domicile, where her glittering eyes flashed round upon him the "welcome home" which her lips spoke but unsteadily,—then on, on, up the hill, the thick trees hiding the sunset and brushing the carriage with leafy hands,—it seemed to Mr. Rollo that still as the very fingngers of his companion were, he could almost feel the

bound of her spirit. Then out on a little platform of the road—and there, he did not know why she leaned forward so eagerly, till he saw across the dell the shining of white marble.

He watched her, but drove on without making the least call upon her attention. The views opened and softened as they drew near the house ; the trees here had been more thinned out, and were by consequence larger ; the carriage passed from one great shadow to another, with the thrushes ringing out their clear music and the wild roses breathing upon the evening air. From out the forest came wafts of dark dewy coolness, overhead the clouds revelled in splendour. Up still the horses went, ever ascending, but slowly, for the ascent was steep. The delay, the length of the drive tired her,—she sat up again—she had been quietly leaning back ; once or twice her hand went up with a quick movement to drive back the feeling that was passing limits ; then gaining level ground once more, the horses sprang forward, and in the falling twilight they swept round before the house. Except the tower, it was but two stories high, the front stretching along, with wide low steps running from end to end. In unmatched glee Dingee stood on the carriage way showing his teeth,—on the steps, striving in vain to clear her eyes so that she might see, was Mrs. Bywank ; her kindly figure, which each succeeding year had gently developed, robed in her state dress of black silk.

Taking advantage of her outside position,—regardless of steps as of wheels,—Wych Hazel vanished from the carriage, it was hard to say how. As difficult as it would have been to guess by what witchcraft a person of Mrs. Bywank's proportions could be spirited through the

doorway—out of sight—in a twinkling of time ; yet it was done, and the steps were empty.

The hill at Chickaree was steepest on the side towards the west, and down that slope an opening had been cut through the trees—a sort of pathway for the sunbeams. The direct rays were gone, and only the warm sky glow brightened the hall door, when the young mistress of the place once more appeared. She stood still a moment and went back again ; and then came Dingee.

'Miss Hazel say, sar, room's ready and supper won't be long. Whar Mass Rollo?"

'I suppose he'll be here directly.'

Mr. Falkirk did not go into the house immediately ; he stood with folded arms waiting, or watching the fading red glow of the western sky. In about ten minutes the tramp of a horse's feet heralded the coming of Mr. Rollo, who appeared from the corner of the house, mounted on an old grey cob, who switched his tail and moved his ears as if he thought going out at that time of day a peculiar proceeding. Dingee staid the rider with the delivery of his young lady's message.

'I'm afraid supper's more than ready somewhere else. I can't stay, my friend—my thanks to the lady.' And letting fall on the little dark figure who stood at his stirrup, a gold piece and a smile, Rollo passed him, bent a moment to speak to Mr. Falkirk, and brought the grey cob's ideas to a head by setting him off at a good pace.

Mr. Falkirk turned and went up the low steps into a short broad hall, and opened a door at the right.

The room was large, opening by glass doors upon a wilderness of grass, trees and flowers. At every corner glass cupboards showed a stock of rare old china ; a

long sideboard was brilliant and splendid with old silver. Dark cabinet ware furnished but not encumbered the room; in the centre a table looked all of hospitality and welcome that a table can. There was a great store of old fashioned elegance and comfort in Wych Hazel's home; no doubt of it; of old-fashioned state too, and old-time respectability; to which numberless old-time witnesses stood testifying on every hand, from the teapot, the fashion of which was a hundred years ancient, to the uncouth brass andirons in the fireplace. Mr. Falkirk came in as one to whom it was all very wonted and well known. The candles were not lit; a soft ruddy light from the west reddened the great mirror over the fireplace and gave back the silver sideboard in it. Not till the clear notes of a bugle, the Chickaree tea-bell, had wound about the old house awakening sweet echoes, did Wych Hazel make her appearance.

'Supper mos' as good hot as de weather,' remarked Dingee. 'Mas Rollo, he say he break his heart dat his profess'nal duties tears him 'way.'

'Dingee, go down stairs,' said Miss Hazel turning upon him,—'and when you tell stories about Mr. Rollo tell them to himself, and not to me. Will you come to tea, sir?'

CHAPTER XI.

VIXEN.

THE birds were taken by surprise next morning. Long before Mr. Falkirk was up, before the house was fairly astir with servants, there was a new voice in their concert; one almost as busy and musical as their own. Reo Hartshorne—the sturdy gardener and lodge-keeper—thought so, listening with wonder to hear what a change it made. Wych Hazel had found him out planting flowers for her, and with his hand taken in both hers had finished the half-begun recognition of last night. Now she stood watching him as he plied his spade, refreshing his labour with a very streamlet of talk, flitting round him and plucking flowers like a humming-bird supplied with fingers. The servants passing to and fro about their work smiled to each other; Mrs. Bywank came by turns to the door to catch a look or a word; Reo himself lifted his brown hand and made believe it was to brush away the perspiration. Another observer who had come upon the scene, observed it very passively—a girl, a small girl, in the dress of the poor, and with the dull eyes of observance which often mark the children of the poor. They expressed nothing, but that they looked.

'Good morning, child,' said Miss Hazel. 'Do you want me to give you a bunch of flowers?'

'No.'

'What then?'

'Mammy sent me to see if the lady was come.'

'Who is mammy? and what does *she* want?' said Wych Hazel, cutting more rosebuds and dropping them into her apron.

'Mammy wants to see the lady.'

'Well, is she coming to see me?'

'She can't come.'

'Why not?'—a quick shower of laughter and dew-drops, called down by a fruitless spring after a spray of white roses.

'She lays abed,' said the child, after the shower was over.

'O, is she sick?' with a sudden gravity. 'Then I will come and see her. Where does she live?'

The child went away as soon as sure arrangements were made for the fulfilment of the promise. Wych Hazel's first visitor! one of the two classes sure to find her out with no delay. And Miss Kennedy was about as well versed in the one as in the other.

The summons came to her to attend the breakfast room. Mr. Falkirk was there, fixed in an easy chair and pamphlet; the morning stir had not reached him.

'How long do we remain at Chickaree?' he asked, as he buttered his muffin.

'Why, dear Mr. Falkirk, you might as well ask me how long gentlemen will wear their present becoming style of head-dress! I don't know.'

'I gather that it would not be safe to order post-horses immediately for departure. The question re-

mains: would it be safe to order other horses for the stable at home? One or the other thing it is absolutely necessary to do.'

'The other horses, sir, by all means. And especially my pony carriage.'

'I shall have to have one built to order,' remarked Mr. Falkirk, after the pause of half an egg.

'And have it lined with blue—to set me off.'

'With a dickey behind—to set me on.'

'No, indeed! I'll have Dingee for an outrider, and then we'll be a complete set of Brownies. You must order quick-footed horses for me, Mr. Falkirk—I may be reduced to the fate of the Calmuck girls.'

A single dark flash was in Mr. Falkirk's glance; but he only said: 'Who is to have the first race, my dear?'

'Mr. Falkirk, you should rather be anxious as to who will have the last. Put get me a fast horse, sir, and let me practise'—and flitting away from the table and about the room Miss Hazel sang—

'"The lady stude on the castle wa',
"Beheld baith dale and down;
"Then she was ware of a host of men
"Came ryding towards the town.
"O see ye not, my merry men a',
"O see ye not what I see?
"Methinks I see a host of men:
"I marvel wha' they be."'

And thereupon, finding she had suddenly come rather close to the subject, Miss Hazel dashed out of the room.

The day proved warm. The air, losing its morning dew and freshness, moved listlessly about among the leaves; the sky looked glassy; the cattle stood panting in the shade, or mused, ankle deep, in the brooks; only the birds were stirring.

With thought and action as elastic as theirs, the young mistress of Chickaree prepared for her visit to the poor woman; afraid neither of the hot sunbeams nor of certain white undulations of cloud that just broke the line of the western horizon. Mr. Faikirk had walked down to his cottage; there was no one to counsel or hinder. And over the horses there was small consultation needed; the only two nags found being a young vixen of a black colt, and an intensely sedate horse of no particular colour which Mrs. Bywank was accustomed to drive to church. Relinquishing this respectable creature to Dingee, Wych Hazel perched herself upon Vixen and set forth; walking the colt now to keep by her little guide, but promising herself a good trot on the way home.

The child had come to show her the way, and went in a shuffling amble by the side of the colt's black legs. For a good while they kept the road which had been travelled yesterday; at last turned off to another which presently became pleasantly shady. Woods closed it in, made it rather lonely in fact, but nobody thought now of anything but the grateful change. There were clouds which might hide the sun by and by, but just now he was powerful and they were only lifting their white heads stealthily in the west. At a rough stile, beyond which a foot track led deeper into the wood, the girl stopped.

'It's in here,' she said.

It was very clear that Vixen could not cross the stile. So her young rider dismounted and looping up the heavy folds of her riding skirt as best she might, disappeared from the eyes of Dingee among the trees. Her dress was a pretty enough dress after all, for though the

skirts were dark and heavy, the white dimity jacket was all airiness and ruffles ; and once fairly in the shade of the trees, Wych Hazel let her riding hat fall back and rest on her shoulders in very childish fashion indeed. Her little guide trotted on before her ; till they saw the house they had come for.

It was a place of shiftless poverty ; of need, no doubt, but not of industry ; Wych Hazel was humbly begged to supply deficiencies which ought not to have been. Inexperienced as she was, she scarcely understood it. Nevertheless she was glad when the visit was over and she could step out of the door again. The clouds had not hid the sun yet, and she went lightly on through the trees, singing to herself according to custom, till she was near the stile ; then she was 'ware' of somebody approaching and the singing ceased. The glance which showed her a stranger revealed also what made her glance again as they drew nearer ; it was a person of uncommonly good exterior and fine bearing. A third glance would not have been given, but that, as they came close, Wych Hazel received the homage of a very profound and courteous salutation, and the gentleman, presenting a branch of white roses, said with sufficient deference,

'Earth must offer tribute ! — and cannot, without hands—'

And then passed swiftly on. Amused, startled, Wych Hazel also quickened her step ; wondering to herself what sort of country she had fallen upon. It was ridiculously like a fairy tale, this whole afternoon's work. The little barefooted guide, the sick woman with her 'your goodness' and 'your ladyship,' now this upstarting knight. There were the roses in her hand, too, as

much like the famed spray gathered by the merchant in 'Beauty and the Beast,' as mortal roses could be! But the adventure was not over. As she reached the stile she heard the same voice beside her again. The stranger held her riding whip, which Wych Hazel had left behind her at the cottage;- the little girl had met him, bringing it, he said. And then he went on—'It is impossible not to know that I am speaking to Miss Kennedy. I am a stranger in the country, but my aunt, Mme. Lasalee, is well known to Mr. Falkirk. Will Miss Kennedy allow me to assist her in remounting?'

It was gracefully said, with quietly modulated tones that belong only to a high grade of society, and the speaker had a handsome face and good presence. Nevertheless, Wych Hazel had no mind to be 'remounted' by any one, and was very near saying as much; for in her, 'temperament' retarded the progress of conventionalism sadly. As it was, she gave him a hesitating assent, and received his proffered assistance. Then lifting his hat, he stood while she passed on.

It was time to ride, for the sky was dark with clouds, the air breathless, and sharp growls of thunder spoke in the distance, at every one of which Vixen made an uneasy motion of ears and head, to show what she would do when they came nearer.

'We must ride for it, Dingee'—Miss Hazel said to her dark attendant.

'Reckon we'll get it, too, Miss Hazel,' was Dingee's reply, and a heavy drop or two said 'yes, it is coming.' Wych Hazel laughed at him, cantering along on her black pony like a brown sprite, the rising wind making free with her hair and hat ribbands, the rose spray made fast to her buttonhole. But as she dashed out of

the woods upon a tract of open country, the distance before her was one sheet of grey rain and mist, and a near peal of thunder that almost took Vixen off her feet, showed what it would be to face such a storm, so mounted. And now the raindrops began to patter near at hand.

But where to go? She had passed no place of refuge in the woodland, and before her the storm hid every thing from sight. So, after a second's thought, Wych Hazel turned and flew down a side road a half a mile to the very door of a low stone house, the first she had seen, sprang off her frightened pony, and darted into the open hall door, leaving Dingee to find shelter for himself and his charge. Then she began to wonder where she was, and what the people would say to her; at first she had been only glad to get off Vixen's back, the pony had jumped and reared at such a rate for the last five minutes.

In the hall, which at a glance she saw was square and wide, and felt was flagged with stone, stood a large packing case; and about it and so busy with it that for a second they did not observe her, were a girl and young man, the latter knocking off boards and drawing out nails with his hammer, while the other hovered over the work and watched it absorbedly. In a moment more they both looked up. The hammer went down and with a face of illumination Rollo came forward.

'Why here she is!' he exclaimed gayly, 'dropped into our hands! and as wet as if she had fallen from the clouds literally. Here Rosy, carry off this lady to your domains. This is Primrose Maryland, Miss Kennedy.

A primrose she evidently was, sweet and good and

fresh like one, with something of a flower's gravity, too. That could be seen at a glance ; also that she was rather a little person, though full and plump in figure, and hardly pretty, at least in contrast with her brilliant neighbour. Wych Hazel's first words were of unbounded surprise.

'From what possible part of the clouds did *you* fall, Mr. Rollo!'—then with a blush and a look of apology to Miss Maryland, 'I ought to excuse myself ; I didn't know where I was coming. And my horse quite refused to stand upon more than two feet at once. I found the storm uncomfortable—and so jumped off and ran in. It's the fault of your door for being open, Miss Maryland!'

'I am very glad,' said Primrose simply. 'The door stood open because it was so hot. We were going to see you this afternoon but the storm hindered us. Now, will you come up-stairs and get on something dry?'

CHAPTER XII.

AT DR. MARYLAND'S.

THEY went up a low staircase and along a gallery to Primrose's room. Large and low, as nice as wax, and as plain. How unlike any room at Chickaree, Wych Hazel could not help feeling, while its little mistress was opening cupboards and drawers, and getting out the neatest and whitest of cambric jackets and ruffles and petticoats, and bringing forth all accommodations of combs and brushes. Meanwhile Wych Hazel could not help seeing some of the tokens about the place that told what kind of life was lived there. Its spotlessly neat and orderly condition was one token; but there were signs of business. Work-baskets, with what seemed fulness of work, were about the room; books, not in great numbers, but lying in little business piles, with business covers and the marks of use. Papers were on one table by the window, with pen and ink and pencil and cards. And everywhere a simplicity that showed no atom of needless expenditure. Very unlike Chickaree?

Primrose the while was neat-handedly helping to

array her guest in fresh apparel. She had pretty little hands, and they were quick and skilful; and as she stooped to try on a slipper or manage a fastening, Wych Hazel had a view of a beautiful head of fair brown hair, in quiet arrangement that did not show all its beauty; and when from time to time the eyes were lifted, she saw that they were very good eyes; as reposeful as a mountain tarn, and as deep too, where lay thought shadows as well as sunshine. They were shining eyes now, with secret admiration and pleasure and good will and eager interest.

'Are you come to stay a good while at Chickaree? I hope you will.'

'Maybe—perhaps. O my boots are not wet, Miss Maryland,—and I don't think I caught enough raindrops to hurt. How kind you are!—And how well your brother describes you.'

'Arthur?—I wish he would not describe me. Chickaree is such a beautiful place, I should think one might like to stay there. I have been hoping about it, ever since I heard you were coming. Father knows Mr. Falkirk, and used to know your father and mother, so well, that I have almost felt as if I knew you,—till I saw you."

'And you don't feel so now?' with a shade of disappointment.

'No,' said Primrose laughing. 'But I am sure I shall very soon, if you will let me. I have wished for it so much! There, won't that do? It is lucky I had some of Prue's things here—mine are too short. Prue is my sister. It looks very nice, I think.'

'O yes,' her guest answered, taking up her bunch of roses, fresh with the rain. 'Thank you very much! But why do you say that about your brother?'

'Arthur?—O—descriptions never tell the truth.'

'I am sure he did,' said Wych Hazel. 'And I know I would give anything to have anybody to talk so about me.'

Primrose returned a somewhat earnest and wondering look at her new friend; then took her hand to lead her down stairs.

In the hall they found Mr. Rollo; not by his packing case exactly, for he had taken that to pieces, and the contents stood fair to view; a very handsome new sewing machine. Surrounded with bits of board and litter, he stood examining the works and removing dust and bits of paper and string. Over the litter sprang to his side Primrose and laid her hand silently in his, and with downcast eyes stood still looking at the machine. The bright eyes under their lids spoke as much joy as Rosy's face often showed; yet she was perfectly still.

'Well?' said Rollo, squeezing the little hand and looking laughingly down at her.

'You are so good!'

'You don't think it,' said he. 'You know better; and as you always speak perfect truth, I am surprised to hear you.'

'You are good to me,' said Primrose in a low tone.

'I should be a pleasant fellow if I wasn't,' said he stooping to kiss her, at which the flush of pleasure on Rosy's cheek deepened; 'but in the meantime it is proper we should look after the comfort of our prisoner.' Then stepping across the litter to where Wych Hazel stood, he went on—'You know, of course, that you stand in that relation to us, Miss Kennedy? Primrose is turnkey, and I am governor. Would you like to see the inside of the jail?'

The 'prisoner' had stood still in grave wonderment at people and things generally; especially at the footing Mr. Rollo seemed to have in this house.

'Governor to a steam engine is an easier po. t,' she said, throwing off her thoughts.

'I have been that'—he said, as he led her into a room on the right of the hall.

This room took in the whole depth of the house, having windows on three sides; low, deep windows, looking green, for the blinds were drawn together. The ceiling was low, too; and from floor to ceiling, everywhere except where a door or window broke the space, the walls were lined with books. There was here no more than up stairs evidence of needless money outlay; the furniture was chintz covered, the table-covers were plain. But easy chairs were plenty; the tables bore writing-materials and drawing-materials and sewing materials; and books lay about, open from late handling; and a portfolio of engravings stood in a corner. Rollo put his charge in an easy chair, and then went from window to window throwing open the blinds. The windows opened upon green things, trees and flowers and vines; the air came in fresher; the rain was softly falling fast and thick, and yet the pale light cheered up the whole place wonderfully.

'Your windows are all shut, Rosy!' said Rollo as he went from one to the other—'is that the way you live? You must keep them open now I am come home!'

'It was so hot,'—said the voice of Rosy from the hall.

'Hot? that is the very reason. What are you about? Rosy!—'

He went to the door, and then from where she sat

Wych Hazel could see the prompt handling which Rosy's endeavours to put away the disorder received. She was taken off from picking up nails, and dismissed into the library; while Rollo himself set diligently about gathering together his boards and rubbish. Primrose came in smiling.

'It is better with the windows open,' she said; 'but I was so busy this morning I believe I forgot. And father never comes into this room till evening. How it rains! I am so glad.'

And taking a piece of work from a basket, she placed herself near Wych Hazel and began to sew. It was a pretty home picture, such as Wych Hazel—in her school life and ward life—had seen few. Just why it made her feel quiet she could not have told. Yet the brown eyes went somewhat gravely from Primrose at her work to the hall where Rollo felt so much at home—then round the room and towards the window, watching the rain.

'Won't you give me some work?' she asked suddenly.

'O talk!' said Primrose, looking up. 'Don't work.'

'It takes more than work to stop my mouth,' said Wych Hazel, 'Ah, I can work, though you don't believe it, Miss Rosy; do please give me that ruffle—or a handkerchief,—don't you want some marked? I can embroider like any German.'

Primrose doubted her powers of sewing and talking both at once; but finally supplied her with an immense white cravat to hem, destined for the comfort of Dr. Maryland's throat; and working and chatting did go on very steadily for some time thereafter, both girls being intent on each other at least, if not on the hemming, till Rollo came back. He interrupted the course of things.

'Now,' said Rollo, 'I am going to ask you first, Prim-

rose—are you setting about to make Miss Kennedy as busy as yourself?'

'I wish I could, you know,' said Primrose, half smiling, half wistfully.

'And I want to know from you, Miss Kennedy, where Mr. Falkirk is this afternoon?'

'In the depths of a nap, I suppose. Is the rain slackening, Mr. Rollo?'

'What do you think?'—as with a fresher puff of wind the rush of the raindrops to the earth seemed to be more hurried and furious. Wych Hazel listened, but did not speak her thoughts. Rollo considered her a little, and then drew up the portfolio stand and began to undo the fastenings of the portfolio.

'Do you like this sort of thing?'

'Very much. O I don't care a great deal about them as engravings, I suppose; but I like to study the faces and puzzle over the lives.'

'This collection is nothing remarkable as a collection—but it may serve your purpose, perhaps.' He set up a large, rather coarse print of Fortitude, by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The figure stands erect, armed with a helmet and plume, one hand on her hip, the other touching just the tip of one finger to a broken column by her side. At her feet a couchant lion.

'Looking at that, not as an engraving, which wouldn't be profitable, what do you see?'

'I was trying to think whether she was Mr. Falkirk's deal,' said Wych Hazel, after a somewhat prolonged study of the engraving. 'She is not mine.'

'Why not?'

'Yes, she isn't mine,' said Primrose. 'Why not, Miss Kennedy?'

'Mr. Falkirk always says, "My dear, be a woman and be brave!"—But I think she fails on both points.'

'I don't understand,' said Primrose, while Rollo's smile grew amused. 'I don't quite understand you, Miss Kennedy. She looks brave to me.'

'No, she don't,' said Wych Hazel decidedly; 'anybody can stick on a helmet. What is that ha'f-asleep lion for, Mr. Rollo?'

'He isn't half asleep!' said Primrose. 'He looks very grimly enduring. But I agree with Miss Kennedy, that Fortitude should not wear a helmet, with a plume in it, too! She is quite as apt to be found under a sunbonnet, I think.'

'Bravo, Prim!' said Rollo.

'And she ought to have her hands crossed.'

'Crossed?' said Wych Hazel.

'Yes, I think so.'

'This fashion?' said the girl folding her tiny hands across her breast. 'They would not stay there two seconds, if *I* was enduring anything.'

Rosy crossed her own hands after another fashion, and was silent.

'How do you generally hold your hands when you are enduring anything?' Rollo asked the other speaker demurely.

'Ah, now you are laughing at me!' she said. 'But I don't think I quite understand passive, inactive fortitude. I like Niobe's arms, all wrapped about her child,—do you remember?'

'I remember. But you don't call *that* fortitude, do you?'

'Yes,' said Wych Hazel. 'She was dying by inches!—and yet her arms look, so strong! I am sure she didn't know whether they were crossed or uncrossed.'

'Do you think that lion there in the corner looks like Mr. Falkirk?'

'No, indeed! Mr. Falkirk would take a good deal more notice of me, if *I* was balancing myself on one finger,' said Wych Hazel.

'What *is* that one finger for?' said Primrose.

'Do you ask that, Rosy? To show that she has nothing earthly to lean upon. She just touches the pillar, as much as to say it is broken and of no use to her. Perhaps her confidence is in that slumbering lion,—Is that another representation of fortitude?'

He had hid Sir Joshua's picture with an engraving of Delaroche's Marie Antoinette leaving the Tribunal.

'She knew what it meant, I should think, if anybody did. But must fortitude—real fortitude—be always unhappy?' said Hazel looking perplexedly at the picture.

Rollo turned back to the Reynolds. 'You were both wrong about this,' said he; 'at least I think so. Real fortitude *does* figuratively, go helmeted and plumed. She endures so perfectly that she does not seem to endure. In this representation the lion shows you the mental condition which lies hid behind that fair, stern front. Now is Marie Antoinette like that?' He turned the pictures again.

'I cannot tell!' said Wych Hazel. 'One minute her fortitude looks just like pride,—and then when you remember all she had to bear, it's not strange if she called up pride to help her. But it is not my ideal yet.

'I think it *is* pride,' said Rollo. 'So it looks to me. Pride and grief facing down death and humiliation. Marie Theresa's daughter and Louis Capet's queen acknowledging no degradation before her enemies—giving them no triumph that she could help. But that is not my ideal either.'

He brought out another print.

'I always like that,' said Primrose.

'I do not know it,' said Wych Hazel.

'Don't you? it is very common. It is the eve of St. Bartholomew. This Catholic girl wants to tie a white favour round her lover's arm, to save him from the massacre soon to begin. She has had the misfortune to love a Huguenot. White favours, you remember, were the mark by which the Catholics were to know each other in the confusion.'

'And he will not let her. Was it a misfortune, I wonder?'

'What?' said Primrose.

'To love somebody so much nobler than herself. How gentle he is in his earnestness!'

'Don't be hard upon her,' said Rollo. 'Are you sure you wouldn't do so in her place?'

'No,—' she said, looking gravely up at him.

'She knew it was death to go without that whitehandkerchief.'

'But,' said Primrose softly, 'wouldn't you rather have him die true, than live dishonoured?'

'I think I should have tried,' said Wych Hazel,—'knowing I should fail. And then I should have thrown away my own favour, and gone with him wherever he went.'

'He wouldn't have let you do that either,' said Rollo.

'Then he would not have loved me as I loved him,' said the girl, very decidedly.

'He'd have been a pretty fellow!' said Rollo, as he turned the next print. It was a contrast to the St. Bartholomew; a Madonna and child, from Fra Bartholomeo, at which they were all content to look silently. Rollo

began to talk, then, instead of asking questions, and made himself very interesting. So much he knew of art matters, so many a story and legend he could tell about the masters, and so well he could help the less initiated to enjoy and understand the work. So letting himself out in a sort of play-fashion, the portfolio proved the nucleus of a delightful hour's entertainment. At the end of that time a turn was given to things by the coming in of an old black woman with a very high, coloured turban on her head and a teakettle and a chafing dish of coals in her hands. Rollo shut up his portfolio.

'What is your view, practically, of things at present, Miss Kennedy?'

'Mr. Falkirk says I never took a practical view of things in my life, Mr. Rollo. The impracticable view seems to be, that it is tea time and I ought to go home.'

'What do you think of the plan of letting Mr. Falkirk know where you are?'

'Yes, I ought to do that,' said his ward, 'Where is Dingee?—I will send him right off.'

'Will you write, or shall I?' said Rollo, drawing out paper and pen ready on one of the tables.

She glanced at him as if in momentary wonder that he should offer to write her despatch, then ran off the most summary little note, twisted it into a knot of complications, and again asked for Dingee. Rollo gently but saucily put his own fingers upon the twisted note and bore it away.

The business of the tea-making and preparing was going on; and both Primrose and her old assistant bustled about the tea table, getting things ready and Dr. Maryland's chair in its right place. A quiet bustle, very pleasant in the eyes of Wych Hazel, with all its homely and sweet

meanings. The light had softened a little, and still came through a grey veil of rain; odours of rose and sweet-briar and evening primroses floated in on the warm, moist air, and mingled with the steam of the tea-kettle and the fume in the chafing-dish; and the patter, patter of rain drops, and the dash of wet leaves against each other, were a foil to the tea-kettle's song. Wych Hazel looked on, musingly, till Rollo came back and took her round the room looking at books. Then offering her his arm, he somewhat suddenly brought her face to face with some one just entering by the door.

An old gentleman; Wych Hazel knew at once who it must be. Middle-sized, stout, with rather thin locks of white hair, and a face not otherwise remarkable than for its look of habitual high thought and pure goodness. It took but a moment to see so much of him. She stopped short, and then came close up to him.

'Is this your charge, Dane? Is this little Wych Hazel?' he went on more tenderly, and folding her in his arms. 'My dear,' he said, kissing her brow, 'I hope you will be as good a woman as your mother was! I am very glad to see you!—very glad indeed!'

She did not answer at first, looking up into his face with a wistful, searching look that was a little eager; standing quite still, as if the enclosing arms were very pleasant to her.

'Yes sir,' she said, 'I am Wych Hazel. But why are you glad to see me?'

'My dear, I knew your mother and father; and I have a great interest in you. I am told you will be queen of a large court up yonder at Chickaree.'

She laughed a little, and coloured, looking down, then back into his face again.

'Will you like me, sir, all you can?'

'All you will give me a chance for. So you must let us see you a great deal; for affection must grow, you know; it cannot be commanded. Sit down, my dear, sit down; Primrose is ready for us.'

It was a right pleasant meal! There was no servant waiting; the little informalities of helping themselves suited well with the quiet home ease and the song of the tea-kettle. Primrose made toast for her father, and Rollo blew the coals to a red heat to hasten the operation. Dr. Maryland sometimes talked and sometimes was silent; and his talk was of an absolute simplicity that neither knew in his own nor imagined in other people's minds any reserves of dark corners. Primrose talked little, but was lovingly watchful not only of her father, but of Wych Hazel, and Rollo too; who on his part was watchful enough over everybody.

'And my dear,' said Dr. Maryland, 'why did you not bring Mr. Falkirk with you?'

'Well, sir, to begin—I did not know I was coming myself! I was out riding, and the rain came—and I jumped off into the first open door I could see. And then Miss Maryland let me stay.'

'But Mr. Falkirk, my dear—where's he?'

'Safe at home, sir. We have been seeking our fortune together, but to-night we got separated.'

'Mr. Falkirk went back and left you?' said Dr. Maryland, looking surprised.

'No, sir, I went ahead and left him. That is,' she added, smothering a laugh, 'he did not set out at all.'

'I thought—I thought, you said you were together?'

'Only in a general way, sir. On all special occasions we divide.

'What did you say you were doing? seeking your fortune?'

'I set out to seek mine,' said Wych Hazel, 'and of course poor Mr. Falkirk has to go along to look on. He doesn't help me one bit.'

'To seek your fortune, my dear?' said Dr. Maryland, looking benignly curious; 'What sort of a fortune are you looking for?'

'Why I don't know, sir. If I knew,—it would be half found already, wouldn't it?' said the girl.

'But my dear—did Mr. Falkirk never tell you that fortunes are never found ready made?'

'He objected, because he said mine was ready made—but that made no difference from my point of view. And then he said he thought our road would "end in a squirrel track, and run up a tree." And do you know, sir,' said Wych Hazel, the hidden merriment flashing out all over her face, 'that was what it really did!'

'Did what, my dear?'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' she said, trying to steady her voice and bring out words instead of a burst of laughter, —'but — that is a wild Western expression, which Mr. Falkirk used to signify that we should get into difficulties.'

'Why did Mr. Falkirk think you would get into difficulties?'—Dr. Maryland had not found the scent yet.

'I don't think he has much opinion of my prudence, sir,—and believes firmly that every one who goes off the highway finds rough ground. Now I like a jolt now and then—it wakes one up.'

'Do you want to find rough ground, my dear?'

'I don't mean really rough, sir, in one sense, but uneven—varied, and stirring, and uncommonplace. It

seems to me that I have a whole set of energies that never come into play upon ordinary occasions. I should weary to death of the lives some people lead—three meals a day, and a cigar, and a newspaper. I think I should fast once a week, for variety—and smoke my cigar wrong end first—if there are two ends to it.'

'I heard a lady say the other day, that there was no end to them,'—observed Rollo.

'Dr. Maryland looked at her on his part, smiling, and quite awake now to the matter in hand. Yet he was silent a minute before speaking.

'Have you laid your plan, my dear? I should very much like to know what it is!'

'No, sir,' she said, shaking her head with a deprecatory little laugh. 'Of course I have not! People in fairy tales never do.'

'Life is not a fairy tale, Hazel,' said Dr. Maryland, shaking his head a little. 'My dear, you are a real woman. Did you ever think what you would try to do in the world?—what you would try to do with your life, I mean?'

'Do with it?' the girl repeated, her brown eyes on the Doctor's face as if looking for his meaning. 'I think, I should like to enjoy it, if I could. And it has been very commonplace, lately, sir. Mr. Falkirk don't pet me and play with me as he used to—and he won't let me play with him; not much.'

The smile which quivered on Dr. Maryland's face changed and passed into a sort of sweet gravity.

'There is one capital way to get out of commonplace,' he said; 'but it isn't play, my dear. If you set about doing what God would have you do with yourself, there will be no dullness in your life, and no lack of enjoyment, either.'

She looked at him again—then down; but made no answer.

'Somebody has written an essay, that I read lately,' Dr. Maryland went on—'an essay on the monotony of piety. Poor man! he did not know what he was talking about. The glorious liberty of the children of God.—that was something beyond his experience;—and the joy of their service. It is what redeems everything else from monotony. It glorifies what is insignificant, and dignifies what is mean, and lifts what is low, and turns the poor little business steps of every day into rounds of Heaven's golden ladder. I verily think I could have hanged myself long ago, for the very monotony of all things else, if it had not been for the life and glory of religion!'

'Why papa!' said Primrose.

'I would, my dear, I do think.' He was silent a moment; then subsiding from the excited fire with which he had spoken, he turned to Wych Hazel and went on gently,—

'What else do you want to do, my dear, that is not to be done in that track? you want adventures?'

'Yes, sir,' she answered, without looking up, half hesitating, a little grave. 'I think I do. And more people about,—people to love me, and that I can love. Of course I love Mr. Falkirk,' she added, correcting herself, 'very much; but that is different. And there's nobody else but the servants.'

'O do come here!' cried Primrose; 'and love us.'

'I do not wonder Mr. Falkirk gives no help,' said Rollo, a little quizzically.

'Will you try Primrose's expedient, my dear?' said Dr. Maryland, very benignly. 'Half your requisition

you will certainly find. Whether you can love us, I don't know; but there's no knowing without trying.'

She gave one of her sweet childish looks of answer to both the first and last speaker; but Mr. Rollo was favoured with a small reproof.

'You must not speak so of Mr. Falkirk,' she said. 'He has been the kindest possible friend to me. And I think he loves me wonderfully, considering how I have tried his patience. Just think what it is for a grave, quiet, grown-up, sensible man, to have the plague of a girl like me! Very few men would stand it at all, Mr. Rollo; but Mr. Falkirk never said a rough word to me in his life.'

She was so grave, so innocent, so ignorant in it all, the effect was indescribably funny.

'I should think very few men would stand it,' said Rollo, composedly; but Primrose and her father smiled.

'Mr. Falkirk is an admirable man,' said Dr. Maryland. 'You are a good witness for him, Hazel.'

'If I would only do all he wants me to!' she said with a slight shake of the head. 'But I cannot, and he says I don't know what I want. But Dr. Maryland—all the nice, proper people I have ever seen, live on such a dead level—it would kill me. They think dancing is wrong, and Italian a loss of time, and "it's a pity to waste my young years upon German." And they can't talk of a book, but some life of a missionary who was eaten by cannibals,—I was very sorry he went there, to be sure, but that didn't make me want to hear about it, nor to go myself. They are just like peach trees trimmed up and nailed to a wall, and I'd rather be wild Wych Hazel in the woods, though it's of no sort of use, and nobody cares for it!' Dr. Maryland might guess

from this frank out-pouring, how seldom it was that the stream of young thoughts found such an exit, how complete was the trust which called it forth. She had quite forgotten her tea. And the doctor forgot his; and bent his gray head towards her brown one.

'But suppose, my dear,' (how different this from Mr. Falkirk's 'my dear,')—'suppose the bush were a conscious thing; and suppose that while it remained in the woods and remained entirely itself, it could yet by being submitted to some sweet influence be made so fragrant that its influence should be known all through the forest; and its nuts, instead of being wild, useless things, should every one of them bring a gift of healing or of life to the hands that should gather them? I would rather it should stay in the woods;—and I never think anything trained against a wall is as good as that which has the sun all round it.'

Wych Hazel looked at him with no sort of doubt in her eyes that he had been "submitted to some sweet influence." And perhaps it was the image he had drawn, that brought a little tremour round her lips, as she answered:

'I do not want to be a wild, bitter, useless thing,—maybe that is what Mr. Falkirk is afraid of, too.'

'I believe,' said Dr. Maryland, 'that He who made all the varieties of plants in the world, and made men as various, never meant that one should take the form or place of another. If it fills its own, and fills it perfectly, it glorifies Him; and does just what it was meant to do.'

'Not to mention the fact,' said Rollo, 'that Wych Hazel could not conveniently personate a pine tree or Primrose a blackthorn.'

But at the entrance of this gentleman as Privy Counsellor, Wych Hazel withdrew her affairs from public notice; however much inclined to vindicate her power of personating what she liked, especially pine trees. She dropped the subject and took up her bread and butter. And so did Dr. Maryland, for a while; but he eat thoughtfully. There was a pause, during which Primrose was affectionately solicitous over Wych Hazel's cup of tea, and Rollo piled strawberries upon her plate. Tea had been rather neglected.

'And what have you been doing, Hazel, all these past twelve years?' said the doctor, breaking out afresh. 'Twelve years!—it is twelve years. What have you done with them, my dear?'

'I was at school, you know, sir, for a while, and then I had no end of tutors and teachers at home.' She drew a long breath.

'And what are you going to do with the next twelve years?—if you should live so long. What are you going to try to do with them, I mean?'

'I want to try to have a good time, sir.'

'And you will be a queen, and hold your court at Chickaree?'

She laughed—her pretty, free laugh of pleasure.

'So Mr. Falkirk says. Only he does not call me a queen—he calls me a mouse!'

Dr. Maryland laughed too, at her or with her, a rare thing for him, but returned to his grave tenderness of look and tone. 'Ah, little Hazel,' he said, 'you are in a dangerous place, my child, with your court up there. Do you know, that when you and the world you want to see, come together,—either you will change it, or it will change you?—that is why I asked you what you

were going to do with the next twelve years. That was a great word of Paul, when his years were almost over, —"I have fought a good fight; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me at that day!"'

He was silent, but so grave, so sweet, so rapt, had been the tone of the last words, that they all kept silence likewise. Dr. Maryland's head fell, he seemed to be seeing something not before him; presently he went on speaking to himself.

'"And not to me only,—but to all them that love his appearing."—My dear,' suddenly to Wych Hazel,—'will you love his appearing, when it comes?'

She?—how could she tell? to whom not only the question but almost the very thought were new. He did not pursue that subject. Presently he left the table and stood up, or walked up and down behind it; while under the sense of his talk and his thought and his presence, they were all quiet; finishing their supper as docilely as so many children. And a reflection from him was on all their faces, making each one more pure and bright than its own wont.

He stayed with the young people after tea, instead of going to his study; and the evening was full of grave interest, which also no one wished less grave. He talked much, sometimes with Wych Hazel, sometimes with Rollo; and Rollo was very amusing and interesting in meeting his inquiries and remarks about German universities and university life. The talk flowed on to other people and things abroad, where Rollo had for some years lately been. The doctor grew animated and drew him out, and every now and then drew Wych

Hazel in, giving her much of his attention and perhaps scrutiny also, though that was veiled.

The talk kept them up late. As they were about separating for the night Rollo asked Wych Hazel if she had found any cats at Chickaree?

'What do you mean?' she said quickly. 'O—I remember'—and the light danced over her face. 'I haven't had much time to find anything. What did you do with my poor kitten up on the mountain, Mr. Rollo?'

'I was going to ask you whether you would like to see an old friend.'

'Yes, to be sure. You do not mean that my little pussy is here?

"You shall have her to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GREY COB.

MORNING has come, and the Queen of Chickaree must return to hold her court. Little guesses the Queen what a court is gathering for her. While she is quietly eating her breakfast at Dr. Maryland's, Mme. Lasalle is ordering her horses, to make a call upon her in the course of the morning, and Mr. Kingsland is thinking in what cravat he shall adorn himself when he goes to do the same thing in the afternoon. For Mr. Kingsland has arrived at home, where he and his old father keep a bachelor sort of household in a decayed old house at one extremity of Crocus. They have a respectable name, folks say, but not wealth to set it off; and the household is small. The same little boy who rubs down Mr. Kingsland's horse waits upon table, and there is nobody else but a housekeeper. But Mr. Morton is thinking he will call too; and Mr. Morton is a man of means; he owns a large part of Mill Hollow, called also Morton Hollow. He occupies a great old brick house in the neighbourhood of the Hollow, and keeps it in excellent repair, and the grass

of the lawn is well shaven. Mr. Morton is well off and has servants enough, but he has years enough too ; Mr. Morton must be forty. Nevertheless he thinks he will call.

Then there is Mrs. ex-Governor Powder also ; she lives in a very good house, and in an irreproachable manner, at a fine place called Valley Garden, ten miles off. Mrs. Powder is an excellent woman, a stately lady, knows what is what, and has been a beauty, and held a court of her own. Indeed she is of a proud old family, and married a little beneath her when she married the man who afterwards became Governor Powder. But what would you have? Women must be married. Mrs. Powder will come to see Miss Kennedy ; she is thinking about it ; but probably she will not come till to-morrow or the day after ; she is not in a hurry. Mme. Lasalle is ; and so is the gentleman of the roses, her nephew. Meanwhile Miss Kennedy knows nothing of all this, nor how furthermore the Lawyer's wife and the Doctor's mother (for there is another doctor at Crocus) are meditating how soon they may ask Miss Kennedy to dinner or to supper, and how soon it will do to go and ask her. They are afraid of seeming in a hurry. Meanwhile Miss Kennedy eats her breakfast.

Breakfast is had in the stone hall, with the doors open front and rear and the Summer day looking in at them. It is very pleasant, and the old black woman, Portia, comes and goes without interfering with the talk at table. The sewing machine stands at one side of the hall still.

'What new affair have you got there, my daughter?' says the doctor.

'It's a sewing machine, papa, which Duke has brought me.'

'A sewing machine! What are you going to do with it?'

'Put her work in her pocket, I hope, sir. I am tired of seeing it in her hand.'

'It is very good of you, Duke; but can she manage it?

'Not yet, sir. Neither of us can. We are going to find out.'

'Well, what's the advantage of it?'

'I brought it up, sir, in the hope and persuasion that it would undertake the clothing of all the poor people at Crocus, and give Rosy time to read philosophy.'

'Why papa,' said Rosy, 'it will do fifteen hundred stitches a minute!'

'You don't want to do more than that in a day, do you, my dear?' said the doctor, with an expression of such innocent amazement, not without some dismay, that they all burst out laughing; and Dr. Maryland but half enlightened, went off to his study.

Much before Primrose wished it, the horses came to the door. Rollo had had his own saddle put upon Vixen, and the grey cob stood charged with the paraphernalia which should accompany the mistress of Chickaree. She had gone up to prepare for her ride, and now came to the front in habit and gauntlets and whip, the rose branch at her button-hole.

'O,' she said in tones so like a bird that the groom might have been pardoned for looking up into the maple boughs over his head to find her; 'you have made a mistake! The other horse is the one I ride. Will you change the saddles, please?—I am sorry to give you the trouble!'

The groom would have been in great bewilderment,

but that luckily his master stood there too. The man's look of appeal was comical, going from one to another. Rollo was looking at girths and buckles, and did not seem to hear. Wych Hazel waited—a slight growing doubt on the subject of his deafness not increasing the pliability of her mood. Then he came towards her, and asked if she was ready?

'I am—but my horse is not.'

'What is the matter with him?'

'I am very sorry to make any delay, Mr. Rollo, but the saddles will have to be changed. I can't ride that grey horse!' And she slipped her hat back and sat down on the doorstep, to await the process.

'There is no mistake,' said Rollo. 'The horses were saddled by my order. I told him to give you the grey. You will forgive me, I hope!'

'Without asking me!' she said, giving him a rather wide-open look of her eyes, and then in a tone as cool as his own—

'I shall ride Vixen, Mr. Rollo, if I ride at all.'

'I hope you will reconsider that.'

'Mr. Rollo,' she said in her gravest manner, 'you and I seem fated to see something of each other—so it will save trouble for you to know at once, that when I say a thing seriously, I mean it.'

He lifted his hat with the old stately air. But then he smiled at her.

'Allow me to believe that you have said nothing seriously this morning?'

Now if Wych Hazel's mood was not pliable, his was the sort of look to make it so. A calmly good-humoured brow, with a clear keen eye, and in both all that character of firm strength to which a woman's temper is

apt to give way. If it had been a question of temper in the ordinary sense. But the lady of Chickaree had nothing of the sort belonging to her that was not as sweet as a rose.

'Allow me!' she said, just a litle bit mockingly 'Well—it's not true, if you do believe it. I shall ride Vixen, or walk.'

'That would be very serious,' said Rollo, 'for it is going to be very hot. What is the matter with the grey cob?'

'I don't like him—and I do like Vixen.'

'Have you ever ridden him?'

'No. And nothing in his appearance predicts that I ever shall.'

'I do not think that Vixen is fit for you to mount. I am going to find out. If she is you shall have her.'

'You can study her as much as you please, with me on her. Why, what nonsense!—as if I didn't ride her all yesterday afternoon!'

"And gave us, if you recollect, afterwards,' said Rollo, looking amused, 'the synopsis of her character.'

'And now you think I am giving you the synopsis of mine,' said Wych Hazel. 'Well, Mr. Rollo, of course your groom will not mind me—will you order the saddles changed? or must I walk?'

'I shall not order the saddles changed. I am afraid. That is no reason why you should be. Fear may be commendable in a man, when it is not desirable in a woman.'

'But I cannot be bothered with anybody's fear but my own!'

He faced her with the same bright, grave face he had worn all along. 'I owe it to Mr. Falkirk to carry you back safe and sound.'

She laughed—her pretty mouth in a curl of fun.

'Ah,' she said, 'before you deal extensively with self-willed women, you need to study the subject! I see the case is hopeless. If you had presented it right end first, Mr. Rollo, I cannot tell what I might have said, but as it is, I can only walk.'

She turned quick about towards Primrose, pulling her hat back into its place; which hat, being ill disposed, first caught on her comb, and then, disengaged, carried the comb with it, and down came Miss Hazel's hair about her shoulders. Not in 'wavy tresses,' or rippling masses,' but in good, honest, wayward curls, and plenty of them, and all her own. The hat had to come off now, and gloves as well, for both hands had as much as they could manage. Rollo took the gloves, and held the hat, and waited upon her with grave punctiliousness, while Primrose looked anxious and annoyed. When hair and hat were in order again and he had delivered the gloves, Rollo requested to be told by the peremptory little owner of them, 'what was the matter with the right end of the subject, now she had got it?'

'I have not got it. The subject has only been gradually turning round as I pushed, like a turnstile. Mr. Rollo, I think it would do you a great deal of good to be thoroughly thwarted and vexed two or three times—then you would learn how to do things.'

'But, dear Miss Kennedy,' said Primrose's distressed voice, 'you are not going to try to walk through this heat?'

Wych Hazel turned and wrapped her arms about Primrose. 'Yes, I am—but I don't think it's hot. And please don't call me "Miss Kennedy"—your father does not.'

'But it's four or five miles.'

'I've walked more than that, often. Good bye—will you let—'

Primrose kissed her for answer, but then gave her a troubled whisper: 'I wish you wouldn't walk. Duke is so sure to be right about the horses.'

'Sure to be right, is he?' said Miss Kennedy. 'Well, I am at least as sure to be wrong. Good-bye!'

Primrose stood looking, doubtful and uncomfortable, and afraid to say any more. Rollo smiled at her as he was leaving the house, looked himself the reverse of uncomfortable, ordered Byron to lead the horses, and set out by the side of Wych Hazel. He was not just in the genial mood of last night and the morning, but cool and gay, as it was his fashion to be; though gravely and punctiliously attentive to his charge. Cool, that is to say, as the day permitted; for the sun was fervent, and pouring down his beams with an overwhelming lavishness of bestowment.

On her part Wych Hazel went quietly on, not with the undue energy which shows some hidden excitement but with a steady step and thoughts most abstractedly busy. She made no sort of remark, unless in answer to her companion, and then with very quiet look and voice. Her changeful face had settled into a depth of soberness. Perhaps it was because of noticing this that his manner grew more gently careful for her; in trifles shown, to be sure, but the touch of a hand and the tone of a word will tell all that as well as much greater things. Evidently he read her and was not angry with her; not even though the way was long and hot, happily it was not dusty—the shower had laid the dust. With undimmed faces and unsoiled foot-gear they paced on, rood

after rood, and Vixen, drooping her head, followed at their heels. The groom had been sent back with the cob, and Rollo walked with the bridle of Vixen in his hands. Chickaree was reached at last.

'What do you expect to find here?' said he, as they entered the gate and were going up the ascent.

'Mr. Falkirk.'

'There is much more awaiting you, then, than you expect. Take care of that acacia branch! See, you must send Dingee, or somebody—who is your factotum?—down here with pruning tools. If I didn't know what to expect, I would try hard for a saw and do it myself this morning. You have scratched your hand!'

'Never mind—yes, I should have kept on gloves, but it was so warm. What do you expect, Mr. Rollo, besides luncheon? You will stay for that, won't you?' she said shyly, yet with a pretty enacting of the hostess. The touch of her own ground made her feel better.

'I should have to stay for so many other things,' he said, looking on the ground as he walked. She glanced at him, not quite sure whether his words covered a negative, and not choosing to ask.

'All this while you don't know that there is company at Chickaree.'

'Company?—how do you know?

'I know by the signs. You will find, I think, Mme. Lasalle up there, and probably a few of her family.'

'Mme. Lasalle!'

By what connection did not appear, but Miss Hazel's fingers were immediately very busy disengaging the rose branch from the button of her habit, where it had hung during the walk.

'I think that is the prospect. But I do not know

that I am under any obligation to meet her, so I think I shall prefer the company of your vixenish little mare Not to speak of the chance of encountering Mr. Falkirk,' said Rollo, lifting his eyebrows. 'I shouldn't like to stand Mr. Falkirk's shot this morning!'

'It will hit nobody but me,' she said, rather soberly.

'Is he a good marksman?'

'Depends a little on what he aims at,' said the girl. 'It is easier, sometimes—as, perhaps, you know—to hit people than things.'

'Take care!' said Rollo, again, as another obstacle in the path presented itself; 'I don't mean anything shall hit you while I have the care of you.' Putting his hands for an instant on the girl's shoulders, he removed her lightly from one side of the walk to the other, and then attacked a sweeping dogwood branch, which, very lovely but very persevering, hung just too low. It cost a little trouble to dispose of it.

They were not on the great carriage road, but following one of the embowered paths which led through the woods. It went winding up, under trees of great beauty, thickset, and now for long default of mastership, overbearing and encroaching in their growth. A wild beauty they made, now becoming fast disorderly and in places rough. The road wound about so much that their progress was slow.

'Chickaree has had no guardian for a good while,' said Rollo, as they went on. 'Look at that elm! and the ashes beyond it. But don't cut too much, when you cut here; nor let Mr. Falkirk.'

'He shall not cut a branch, and I love the thickets too well to meddle with them. Unless they actually come in my face.'

'Then you do not love the thickets well enough. Come here,' said he, drawing her gently to one side,—'stand a little this way—do you see how that white oak is crowding upon those two ashes? They are suffering already; and in another year it would be in the way of that beautiful spruce fir. And the white oak itself is not worth all that.'

'But if you cut it down there will be a great blank space. The crowding is much prettier than that!'

'The blank space in two years' time will be filled again.'

'So soon?' she said doubtfully. Then with one of her half laughs,—'You see I do not believe pruning and thinning out and reducing to order agrees with everything; and naturally enough my sympathies are the other way. I like to see the stiff leaves and the soft leaves all mixed up together; they show best so. Not standing off in open space—like Mr. Falkirk and me.'

He took her up in the same tone; and for a little more of the way there was a delicious bit of talk. Delicious, because Wych Hazel had eyes and capacities; and her companion's eyes and capacities were trained and accomplished. He was at home in the subject; he brought forward his reading and his seeing for her behoof; recommended Ruskin, and gave her some disquisitions of his own that Ruskin need not have been ashamed of. For those ten or fifteen minutes he was a different man from what Wych Hazel had ever seen him. Then the house came in sight, and a new subject claimed their attention. For the mare, whether scenting her stable or finding her spirits raised by getting nearer home, abandoned her quiet manner of going, and after a little dancing and pulling her bridle, testified her dis

approbation of all sorts of restraint by flinging her heels into the air, and being obliged to follow her leader, she repeated the amusement continuously.

'Do your drawing-room windows look on the front?' said Rollo.

'Some of them. Why?'

'Then, by your leave, as I do not care to act the Merry Andrew for half a dozen pair of eyes, I will go to the rear to mount.' But instead of his more stately salutation, he held out his hand to Wych Hazel with a smile.

'Good bye,' she said. 'I am sorry you have had such a hot walk. But why don't you mount here?'

'I like to choose my audience when I exhibit.'

He clasped Wych Hazel's hand after the fashion of the other day; then disappeared one way as she went the other.

Passing swiftly on, holding up her long riding skirt so that it seemed no encumbrance, musing to herself on past events and present expectations; and not without a certain flutter of pleasure and amusement and timidity at the part she had to fill, Wych Hazel reached the low, broad steps and went in.

A slender little person, as airy and independent as the bush she was named for; one of those figures that never by any chance fall into any attitude or take any pose that is not lovely. Hair—as to arrangement—decidedly the worse for the walk; cheeks a little warmed up with the sun, and perhaps other things; grave eyes, where the woman was but beginning to supplant the child; a mouth as sweet as it could be, in all its changes; and a hand and foot that were fabulous. So the mistress of Chickaree went in to receive her first instalment of visitors.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOLDING COURT.

SHE was scarcely within the door when Mr. Falkirk met her, put her arm within his and led her into the drawing-room. For a few minutes there the impression was merely of a flutter of gauzes, a shifting scene of French bonnets, a show of delicately gloved hands, and a general breeze of compliments and gratulations, in those soft and indeterminate tones that stir nothing. Mme. Lasalle it was, with a bevy of ladies, older and younger, among whom it was impossible at first to distinguish one from the other. So similar was in every case the display of French flowers, gloves and embroidery; so accordant the make of every dress and the modulation of every tone. Mme. Lasalle herself was, however, prominent, having a pair of black eyes which once fairly seen were for ever after easily recognizable. Fine eyes, too; bright and merry, which made themselves quite at home in your face in half a minute. She was overflowing with graciousness. Her nephew, the gentleman of the roses, the only cavalier of the party, kept himself in a modest background.

'I have been longing to see you at home, my dear, said Mme. Lasalle. 'All in good time; but I always am impatient for what I want. And then we have all wanted you; the places of social comfort in the neighbourhood are so few that we cannot afford to have Chickaree shut up. This beautiful old house! I am so delighted to be in it again. But I hope you have met with no accident this morning? You have not?'

'Accident?—O no!'

'You have surely not been thrown,' said another lady.

'No, ma'am.' The demure face was getting all alight with secret fun.

'But how was it?' pursued Mme. Lasalle, with an air of interest. 'We saw you walk up to the door—what had become of your horse?'

'He walked to another door.'

'And you have really been taking foot exercise this morning,' said the lady, in whose eyes and the lines of her face might be seen a slight shadow. Miss Kennedy then had been on foot of choice, and so accompanied! And Wych Hazel was too inexperienced to notice—but her guardian was not—that Mr. Nightingale, to whom he had been talking, paused in his attention and turned to catch the answer.

'I have been finding out that my woods need attention,' said Miss Kennedy, who never chose to be catechised if she could help it. 'It is astonishing that they can have grown so much in these years when I have grown so little!'

'You have got to make acquaintance with a great many other things here besides your trees. Do you know any of your neighbours? or is it all unbroken ground?'

'I do not even know how much there is to break.'

'How delicious!' remarked a languid lady. 'Think of coming into a region where all is new! Things get so tiresome when you know them too well.'

'People and all!' said Mr. Falkirk.

'Well, yes—don't you think they do? When there is nothing more to be found out about them.'

'I don't agree with you,' said another lady. 'I think it's so tiresome to find them out. When you once know them, then you give up being disappointed.'

'My dear Clara!' said Mme. Lasalle, 'what a misanthropical sentiment! Miss Kennedy, I know by her face, will never agree with you. Were you ever disappointed, my dear, in your life? There! I know you were not.'

'Not often, I think.' What were they talking about, —these people who looked so gay and spoke so languidly? Miss Kennedy rang for refreshments, hoping to revive them a little.

'But, my dear, how far have you walked in this hot sun? You see, you quite dismay us country people. Do tell us! How far have you walked?'

'The miles are as unknown to me as the inhabitants,' she said gayly. 'But we brown people are never afraid of the sun.'

'Miles!' said Mme. Lasalle looking round her. 'Imagine it!' Then as the lady took a piece of cake, she remarked casually:

'I think I saw an old acquintance of mine with you —Dane Rollo, was it not?'

'Mr. Rollo? Yes.'

'He has not been to see me since he came home—I shall quarrel with him. I wonder if he has been to

Mrs. Powder's. Mr. Falkirk, don't you think Dane had a great penchant for one of Mrs. Powder's beautiful daughters before he went abroad?'

'I am not in the confidence of either party, madam,' replied Mr. Falkirk.

'If he had he would have taken her with him,' said another of the party.

'O that don't follow, you know. Maybe her mother thought she was too young—or *he*, perhaps. She is a beautiful girl.'

'Not my style of beauty,' said the languid lady with an air of repulsion.

'What has he been doing in Europe all this time?' pursued Mme. Lasalle. 'Been to Norway, hasn't he?'

'I believe he went there.'

'He has relations there, Dr. Maryland told me.'

'Dr. Maryland knows,' said Mr. Falkirk.

'Perhaps he will settle in Norway.'

'Perhaps he will.'

'But how dreadful for his wife! Mrs. Powder would not like that. He's a great favourite of mine, Dane is; but I am afraid he has rather a reputation for breaking ladies' hearts. What do you think, Mr. Falkirk? He is welcome everywhere. Maybe it's Norwegian fashion; but I think Dr. Maryland is very imprudent to let him come into his house again—if he does. Do you know the Marylands, my dear?' turning to Wych Hazel again.

'They knew me, long ago,' she said. 'I have been here but two days now.'

'The daughter—this daughter—is a singular girl, is she not?'

'I do not know—I like her,' said Wych Hazel.

'Oh she's very queer,' said another young lady.

'I have no doubt she is *good*,' Mme. Lasalle went on; no doubt at all. But I have heard she lives in a strange way—among children and poor people—going about preaching and making clothes. A little of that is all very well; I suppose we might all do more of it, and not hurt ourselves; but is not Miss Maryland quite an enthusiast?'

Wych Hazel was getting very much amused.

'She was not enthusiastic over me,' she said, 'and I have not seen her tried with anything else. Where does she preach?'

'You will find her out. Wait till you know her a little better. She will preach to you, I have no doubt. Prudentia, Mrs. Coles, is very different. She is really a charming woman. But my dear Miss Kennedy, we have been here a length of time that it will not do to talk about. We have had no mercy upon Mr. Falkirk, for we were determined to see you. Now you must come and spend the day with me to-morrow, and I'll tell you everything. We are going on a fishing expedition up the Arrow; and we want you. And you must come early; for we must take the cool of the morning to go and the cool of the afternoon to come back. I'll see you home safe. Come! say yes.'

'I will if Mr. Falkirk does, ma'am, very gladly.'

'Let her go!' whispered another member of the party, who had been using her eyes more than her tongue. 'Give her a loose rein now, Mr. Falkirk, and hold her in when Kitty Fisher comes.'

'Pshaw! she isn't under guardianship at that rate,' said Mme. Lasalle. 'Mr. Falkirk, isn't this lady free yet?'

'I am afraid she never will be, madam.'

'What do you mean by that? But does she have to ask your leave for everything she does?'

'No one acquainted with the wisdom of Miss Kennedy's general proceedings would do me so much honour as to think the wisdom all came from me!' said Mr. Falkirk dryly.

'Well, you'll let her come to Moscheloo?'

'Certainly.'

The lady looked at Wych Hazel. The laughing eyes had grown suddenly quiet. It was with a very dignified bend of the head that she repeated Mr. Falkirk's assent.

'I shall not ask *you*,' said the lady to Miss Kennedy's guardian; 'it is a young party entirely, and must not have too much wisdom, you understand. I'll bring her home.'

'I am no sportsman, madam,' said Mr. Falkirk with a smile; 'and my wisdom will probably be busy to-morrow in Miss Kennedy's plantations.'

With that, the train of ladies swept away, with renewed soft words of pleasure and hope and congratulation. They rustled softly through the hall, gently spoke ecstasies at the hall door, mounted upon their horses and got into their carriages, and departed. Mr. Falkirk came back to his ward in the hall.

'Now that to-morrow is provided for,' he said, 'I should be glad to hear, Miss Hazel, the history of yesterday. It is quite impossible to know a story from Dingee's telling of it. And do you think you could give me some luncheon?'

'Certainly, sir.' She was just disposing of hat and whip upon a particular pair of chamois horns on the wall. They hung a little high for her, and she was springing to reach them like any airiest creature that

ever made a spring. 'Perhaps you will be so kind as to be seated, Mr. Falkirk?—in the dining room—for a moment. Dingee!'—her voice rang softly out clear as an oriole. 'Luncheon at once—do you hear, Dingee? Don't keep Mr. Falkirk waiting.'

Mr. Falkirk stood still looking at all this, and waiting with an unmoved face.

'Will you excuse my habit, sir? as you are in haste. And am I to give you the "history" here, all standing?'

'Go! but come,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'We have met only one division of the enemy yet, my dear.'

She glanced at him, and went off, and was back; all fresh and dainty and fragrant with the sweet briar at her belt. Then silently made herself busy with the luncheon; creamed Mr. Falkirk's chocolate; then suddenly exclaimed:

'Could you make nothing of *my* version, sir?'

'Not much. Where were you going?'

'I was coming home.'

'From Dr. Maryland's?'

'Not at all, sir. I should have said, I was on my way home,—and the storm began, and I took a cross road to expedite matters—and then I grew desperate, and ran into an unknown, open door, and so found myself at Dr. Maryland's.'

'Very intelligible. My question looked to the beginning of your expedition.'

'Well, sir—I would rather—but it does not signify. There came a small Bohemian here in the morning to get help for her sick mother; and I went. That is all.'

'Who is the mother, Miss Hazel? Where does she live?'

'I don't know her name. And her habitation only

when I see it. All places are alike to me here yet, you know.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Falkirk gravely, 'you must see that *being* so ignorant of people and things in this region, you had better not make sudden expeditions without taking me into your confidence. Dingee said you rode the little black mare?'

'True, sir.'

'You did not like her well enough to ride her home?'

'Quite well enough, sir.'

'You did not do it?'

'No,' said Wych Hazel—'that Norwegian pirate took her for his own use, and I walked.'

'Wouldn't let you ride her, eh?' and a curious gleam came into Mr. Falkirk's eyes.

'"Wanted to try her first"—and was "bound to be afraid, though I was not"—and "couldn't answer it to you"—and so forth and so forth. A man can generally find words enough.'

'Depend upon it, my dear, he generally borrows them of a woman.' Mr. Falkirk's face relaxed slightly, and he took a turn across the room; then stood still. 'Why didn't you ride the cob home?—he is there still, isn't he?'

'I did not choose, sir. I should, if I had been asked properly.'

'Were you not asked?'

'No, except by having my saddle put on that horse and then not taking it off.'

'You made the demand?'

'Of course. That is, I told the groom to do it.'

Mr. Falkirk smiled and then laughed, or came as near to laughing as he often did.

'So you wouldn't ask him into the house? But did you see anybody else in your yesterday's expedition, my dear?'

She glanced up at him, evidently growing restive under this cross-questioning.

'I saw Mr. Nightingale.'

'Nightingale!' echoed Mr. Falkirk, 'Where did you see Mr. Nightingale, Miss Kennedy?'

'In the woods.'

'And what the——. My dear, what were you doing in the woods?'

'Won't you finish your first sentence first, sir? I like to take things in order.'

Mr. Falkirk's brows drew together; he looked down and then he looked up, awaiting his answer.

'I was doing nothing in the woods, sir, but finding my way home.'

'How came *he* to be there? Did he speak to you?'

'Yes, sir, he spoke to me.'

'What did he say?' said Mr. Falkirk, looking very gravely intent.

'Before we go any further, Mr. Falkirk,' said the girl, steadily, though she coloured a good deal, 'is it to be your pleasure in future to know every word that may be said to me? Because in that case, it will be needful to engage a reporter. You must see, sir, that I should never be equal to it.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Falkirk slowly, 'we are embarked on a search after fortune;—which always embraced on my part an earnest purpose to avoid misfortune.'

'You sit there,' she went on, scarce heeding him, 'and ask me "where I was" and "where I was going" and "what I said"—as if I would forget myself among strange

people in this strange place!—And then you take for granted that I would be rude to one person whom I do know, just because he had vexed me! I *did* ask him in, and he wouldn't come. I am unpractised—wild, maybe—but am I so unwomanly, Mr. Falkirk? Do you think I am?' It was almost pitiful, the way the young eyes scanned his face. If Mr. Falkirk had not been a guardian! But he was steel.

Yet even steel will give forth flashes, and one of those flashes came from under Mr. Falkirk's brows now. His answer was very quiet.

'My dear, I think you no more unwomanly than I think a rose unlovely—but the rose has thorns which sometimes prick the hands that would train it out of harm's way. And it might occur even to your inexperience that when a gentleman who does not know you presumes to address you, he can have nothing to say which it would not be on several accounts proper for me to hear.'

Again the colour bloomed up.

'You would know, if you were a woman, Mr. Falkirk, how it feels to have a man sit and question you with such an air. Ah,' she said, dashing off the tears which had gathered in her eyes, 'if you really think I can take no better care of myself than that, you should not have said I might go with those people to-morrow!—A rose's thorns are for *protection*, sir!'—And away she went, out of the room and up the stairs; and Mr. Falkirk heard no more till Dingee entered with fruit and biscuits.

'Missee Hazel hope you'll enjoy yours, sar,—she take her's upstairs.'

Mr. Falkirk put on his hat and walked down to his house.

It was a slight fiction on the part of Dingee, to say

that Miss Hazel was taking her fruit upstairs ; indeed the whole message was freely translated from her.

'Dingee, attend to Mr. Falkirk's lunch, I don't want any.'

Presently now came Dingee to her with another message.

'Massa Morton—he 'most dyin' to see Miss Hazel —but he wait till she done had her lunch.'

And she flashed down upon Mr. Morton's eyes, like a prism-caught-sunbeam. By this time there were two pairs of eyes to be dazzled. Mr. Dell had made his appearance on the stage.

Mr. Dell was a clergyman, of a different denomination, who like Mr. Maryland had a church to take care of at Crocus. Mr. Dell's was a little church at the opposite corner of the village and society. He himself was a good-hearted, plain man, with no savour of elegance about him, though with more than the usual modicum of sense and shrewdness. Appearance conformable to character. Mr. Morton was not very far from Mr. Falkirk's range of years, though making more attempts to conceal the fact. Rich, well educated, well mannered, a little heavy, he had married very young ; and now a widower of twenty years standing, the sight of Wych Hazel had suggested to him what a nice thing it would be to be married again. The estates too suited each other, even touched at one point. With this gentleman Wych Hazel had some slight acquaintance, and he introduced Mr. Dell; thinking privately to himself how absurd it was for such men to come visiting such women.

'I see with pleasure that you have quite recovered from the fatigues of your journey, Miss Kennedy. A day's rest will often do wonders.'

'Yes, sir. Especially if you spend a good piece of it on horseback, as I did.'

'On horseback!' said Mr. Morton, looking doubtful—(he hoped she was not going to turn out one of those riding damsels, who went rough shod over all his ideas of propriety.) 'Did you go out so soon to explore the country?'

'No, sir. I went out on business.'

'Ah!'—(how admirable in so young a person.)

'There is business enough in city or country,' said straightforward Mr. Dell—'if you are disposed to take hold of it. Even our little Crocus will give you plenty.'

'All the year round, sir?—or does Crocus go to sleep in the winter like most other bulbs?'

'It is another species from any that you are acquainted with, I am afraid,' said the clergyman, looking at her with mingled curiosity and admiration. 'Bulbs when they go to sleep require no attention, I believe; but our Crocus wants most of all in the cold season. We want lady gardeners too,' said Mr. Dell, following the figure.

'It is a most healthful exercise,' said Mr. Morton, 'and the slight disadvantages of dress, etc., rather form a pleasant foil, I think, to the perfection of attire at other times. Are you fond of gardening, Miss Kennedy?'

'Very fond!' said Miss Kennedy, demurely. 'But that is one of the times when I like to be particularly perfect in my attire, Mr. Morton. Why, Mr. Dell, the bulbs must be kept from freezing, you know, if they *are* asleep. Isn't Miss Maryland one of your successful gardeners?'

'Miss Maryland does all she can, madam,' said Mr. Dell, earnestly. 'She has been the good angel of the village for five years past.'

'That is just what she looks like,' said Wych, with a glow of pleasure. 'And I'm going to help her all I can.'

'But do you not think,' said Mr. Morton, with the dubious look again—'you are talking, I imagine, of Miss Mary Anne's visits among the lower classes,—do not you think they make a young lady too prominent—too public—Mr. Dell? They bring her among very rough people, Miss Kennedy, I assure you.'

'But, sir, one would not lose the chance of being a good angel for the fear of being prominent.'

'Or for the fear of anything else,' said Mr. Dell.

'Truly not,' said Mr. Morton. 'But we gentlemen think, Miss Kennedy, that ladies of a certain stamp can scarcely fail of so desirable a position.'

'Ah, but I want a pair of bona fide wings!' said Wych Hazel, and she looked so comically innocent and witch-like that Mr. Morton forgot all else in admiration; and Mr. Dell looked at her with all his eyes as he remarked,—

'Not to fly away from the poor and needy—as many of Mr. Morton's angels do.'

'Do they?' said Wych Hazel,—'where do they fly to? Mr. Morton, what becomes of your angels?'

'My angels,' said Mr. Morton with some emphasis on the pronoun, 'would never be in the majority. When I said "ladies of a certain stamp," I by no means intended to say that the class was a large one.'

'No, sir, of course not. If the class were large, I should suppose the stamp would become very uncertain. Mr. Dell, what does Crocus want most, just now?'

'I should say—angels,' said Mr. Dell. He spoke with a smile, but with a shrewd and sensible eye withal. He was not a beauty, but he had mettle in him.

'That's a bad want in the present state of the case, as set forth by Mr. Morton. Are gold angels good for anything as a substitute?'

'Good for very little. When I said angels, I spoke of what the world most wants, as well as Crocus; angels in human form, I mean, or rather, in their human state of initiation. There is no substitute. Gold will do something; but nothing of what a good man or a good woman will do—anywhere.'

'Miss Kennedy,' said Mr. Morton, rising, 'I regret much that a business appointment calls me away. But if you will indulge me, I will call again the day after to-morrow, in the afternoon, and perhaps I may hope for your company on a drive. You must make acquaintance with this fine region.'

'Thank you'—Wych Hazel hesitated, looking for some retreat, finally took shelter behind her guardian. 'Thank you, sir, I will ask Mr. Falkirk.'

'Miss Kennedy,' said Mr. Morton, extending his hand, 'you must allow me to express my admiration! I wish other young ladies were so thoughtful and prudent. But if they were, it would not make your conduct less remarkable.' And Mr. Morton departed, while Wych Hazel, turning a sharp pirouette on one toe, dropped into her chair like a thistle down. But all that appeared to the eyes of Mr. Dell was a somewhat extensive flutter of muslin. He had no time to remark upon it nor upon anything else, as there immediately succeeded a flutter of muslin in another direction, just entering in by the door; which secondary flutter was furnished by the furbelows of Mrs. Fellows, the lawyer's wife, and the scarf of Mrs. Dell, the mother of the clergyman himself. There was no more question about angels.

CHAPTER XV.

TO MOSCHELOO.

THE next morning Mr. Falkirk appeared in the breakfast-room, as was his very frequent, though not invariable wont.

'I want your orders, Miss Hazel, about horses.'

Hazel—deep in a great wicker tray of flowers—looked up to consider the question.

'Well, sir,—we want carriage horses of course,—and saddle horses. And I want a pony carriage.'

'I don't think you need two carriages at present. The pony carriage would have to have a pony.'

'Yes, sir. Pony carriages, I believe, generally do. I am not well enough known in the neighbourhood yet to expect other means of setting my wheels in motion. But if I have nothing *but* that, Mr. Falkirk, then you, and I can never go together.'

'And if you do *not* have that, then you could not go alone.'

'Precisely, sir. Mr. Falkirk, don't you want a rose—what shall I say !—to—do something to your meditations ?' And before Mr. Falkirk had time to breathe,

she was down on her knees at his side, and fastening an exquisite "Duchess of Thuringia" in his buttonhole.

'Yes, I look like it,' said he grimly, but suffering her fingers to do their will nevertheless. 'Miss Hazel, if the princess goes about in a pony carriage, I shall be in daily expectation of its turning into a pumpkin, and leaving her on the ground somewhere.'

'No, sir. Not the least fear of your turning into an amiable godmother,—and you know that was essential.'

'Ponies are ugly things,' said Mr. Falkirk ruefully. 'However, I'll ask Rollo; and if he can find one, that suits him——'

'Then do let him keep it!' interposed Miss Hazel, facing round. 'What possible concern of Mr. Rollo's are my horses?'

'Simply that I am going to ask him to choose them. He knows more about such things than any one else, and I dare say he will give me his help. I wanted to know your fancy, though very likely it can't be met, about the other horses; colour and so forth.'

'Not white—and not black,' said Wych Hazel. 'And not sorrel—nor cream.'

'That is lucid. You said saddle horses—Ah! what's this?'

It was a little combination of brisk sounds in the hall, followed by the entrance of Rollo himself in a gray fisherman's dress. Unless he was very hard to suit he might have enjoyed the picture now opened before him. The pretty room, with its garden outlook; the breakfast table, bright and quaint together, with its old-time furnishings; and flowers everywhere, arranged and unarranged. As he came in, Wych Hazel had just (quite

surreptitiously) hung a garland of pansies on the high carved peak of Mr. Falkirk's chair, and then dropped into her own place; with a De Rohan rose in the belt of her gray dress. Not in the least like Rollo's gray, but white with the edge taken off, like a pale cloud.

'So!' she said, looking up at him as he stood beside her,—'have you come to confess?'

'Not this time. I have come to ask if I may catch some of your trout—if I can.'

'*Not* this time! If you wait for another the score will be heavier.'

'May I have your trout?'

'Really, if they give their consent I will. Good morning, Mr. Rollo!—will you sit down and let me give you some coffee?'

'As I came for that too, I will, thank you. Will you lend me Vixen to-day?'

'Why yes—as I am going fishing myself, and so cannot use her,' said Miss Hazel, giving critical attention to cream and sugar. 'But it is very good of me—after the way you have behaved.'

'It is very good of you. Is that thing all you have got to ride, except the respectable cob?'

'Half broken, isn't she?' asked Mr. Falkirk.

'Half—hardly. She shies wickedly.'

'I am glad Hazel hears you. I hope she will not mount her again after that.'

Rollo's eyes came over to Wych Hazel's with an expression she could not quite read. It was not petitioning; it might be a little inquisitive. But she chose rather to answer Mr. Falkirk.

'I needed no help to find out that she shied, sir. Then I have a little sympathy with that particular

species of what Mr. Rollo is pleased to call "wicked ness."'

'It is very unfair, of course,' said Rollo, 'to speak of an action from its results—but we all do it. Now a horse's shying may break your neck. It is true a lady's shying may break your heart; but that don't count.'

'We were just talking about horses, Rollo. I want your help.'

'I will give it with promptness—if Miss Kennedy command me.'

'Mr. Rollo's innocent way of talking about commands would deceive anybody but me,' said Wych Hazel. 'But I am learning to know him by slow and painful degrees.'

The only answer to this was a mischievous smile, which did not embolden further charges. But whether boldly or not, Hazel went on with a fair show at least of bravery.

'What was that I was told so impressively yesterday?' she said. '"There are circumstances where fear is highly commendable in a woman, when it is yet not desirable in a man." And after all that, did you not speed away like a very poltroon, and leave me to face everything by myself? Confess, Mr. Rollo!' The demure eyes were brimming with fun.

'How much did you have to face?' asked the gentleman taking another roll.

'Ten people and two catechisms. And if Madame Lasalle says true—Have you a sketching club here? and is she its president?'

'We have no such club—and it has no such president—and whether Madame Lasalle says true is a matter entirely unknown to me. Do you say you are going fishing to-day, Miss Kennedy?'

'Mr. Falkirk told Madame Lasalle I might. And she is to "tell me everything,"—fill up her sketches, I suppose; so the sport may be extensive. Yesterday her pencil marks were delightfully indistinct, and made the most charming confusion between cats and dogs and canary birds. Miss Maryland was a preacher, her father the personification of imprudence, and you—'

She had run on in a sort of gleeful play, not at all guessing what the pencil marks really meant, and stopped short now only for fear her play might chafe.

'What was I?' said Rollo, with a quietness that was evidently careless.

'You,' said Wych Hazel impressively, 'were (in a general way) a Norwegian, a Dane,—making your way everywhere and laying waste the country.'

Something in Mr. Falkirk's face as she finished these words made her instinct take alarm. The colour mounted suddenly.

'O, please do not speak to me again—anybody!' she said, looking down. 'I was all alone yesterday afternoon, and had to descend into the depths of Morton Hollow—and I believe I am a little wild at getting back. And Mr. Morton, sir—O, you have not asked what he said to me!' She checked herself again, too late! Whatever should she do with her tongue to keep it still. The Camille de Rohan at her belt was hardly deeper dyed than she.

'What about Mr. Morton?' said Rollo. 'Forgive somebody for speaking—but it was impossible to ask without!'

'O—nothing—only a compliment for Mr. Falkirk,' said the girl, trying to rally. 'And Mr. Falkirk had said—And I have lived so long alone with Mr. Falkirk,

that I have got into a very bad habit of forgetting that anybody else can be present!'

It did not exactly help on the progress of self-control, that at this point Dingee came in, bearing in both hands a lovely basket of hot-house grapes and nectarines, themselves specimens of perfection, with a long wreathing stem of wonderful white orchids laid across its other treasures. Dingee evidently enjoyed his share in the business, for his white teeth were in a glitter.

'Mass' Morton, Miss Hazel. He done send 'em to my young mistiss, wid his greatest 'spects. He say he done percolate de Hollow and couldn't find nuffin more gorgeous, or he'd send *him*.'

'Dingee!' said his young mistress, flashing round upon him, 'do you venture to bring me a made-up message? Take the basket to Mr. Falkirk!'

But she shrank back then, as they saw, with extreme shyness. The little fingers trembled, trying to busy themselves among spoons and cups; and one pitiful glance towards Mr. Falkirk besought him to take the affair into his own hands, and send whatever return message might be needful. O to be a child, and put her head down under the table! And instead of that she must keep her place—and she did, with the most ladylike quietness. Mr. Falkirk had reason to be content with her for once.

'Nobody waiting, is there, Dingee?' said Mr. Falkirk.

'Ye' sir.'

'Take him this, and send him off politely; but no message, Dingee, if you want to wag your tongue in *this* house!'

'Ye' sir. Got to be one somehow, sure!' said Din-

gee. ''Bout sumfin Mass' Morton done say to Miss Hazel. 'Real stupid feller he is dat come—can't make out what he says, nohow.'

'About a drive,' said Wych Hazel, looking over once more at her guardian. 'I expect you to say no, sir.'

'What did *you* say, my dear.'

'I said I would ask you, sir—the shortest way to a negative.' Her lips were getting in a curl again.

Mr. Falkirk went out to speak to Mr. Morton's messenger, and coming back again stood looking down at the basket of fruit with the wreath of white orchids lying across it.

'I hope you are grateful to fortune, my dear,' he remarked rather grimly.

'I hope you are, sir,—*I* have nothing to do with that concern,' said Wych Hazel with prompt decision.

'You don't know,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'It's an enchanted basket, Miss Hazel. Looks innocent enough; but I know there are several little shapes lurking in its depths—ants or flies or what not—which a little conjuration from you would turn into carriage horses, pony and all.'

'They are safe to eat grapes in the shape of ants and flies for the term of their natural lives,' said Rollo contentedly. He did not care for Mr. Morton. Indeed he looked as if it would be difficult to disturb him, more than superficially, about anything. And that, not for want of elements of disturbance, but because of other elements of character, which in their strength slumbered, and perhaps were scarcely self-conscious. The last words moreover were a shield over Wych Hazel's possible shyness. However it was, Mr. Fal-

kirk looked across from the orchids to him, and considered him somewhat fixedly.

'If we are not to get them out of the basket—but that would be very like a fairy tale—will you see to the matter of the horses, Rollo?'

'If Miss Kennedy commands me,' he said, with a smile. But Miss Kennedy was in a mood to keep her distance.

'I have told Mr. Falkirk,' she said. And now came up the question of her engagement at Moscheloo; if she was going, she ought to be off, and it appeared that there was no vehicle on the place in fit order to take her. Mr. Falkirk proposed to send to Crocus.

'Too far,' said Rollo. 'Suppose you put yourself in the saddle, and let me convoy you over to Moscheloo? It's good for a ride, this morning.'

'I thought you wanted Vixen?' said the girl, turning towards him.

'*You* don't.'

'Do you know what I do want, as well as what I do not, Mr. Rollo?'

'The trouble is, it is not to be had to-day. But there is the grey cob. Always take the best there is to be had. Put on your habit, and I'll give you a very decent canter across the country to Moscheloo. Come!' he said, with a look compounded of sweetness and raillery. But raillery from Rollo's eyes was a little keen.

She laughed with a pretty acknowledgment of the raillery, but at first did not answer. It was a great temptation! The breakfast had left her excited and restless, and to get away from it all—to have a canter in the fresh wind! Then, she hated the very name of the grey cob! —She looked over to Mr. Falkirk. He was looking at her earnestly, but he did not speak.

'Shall I do that, sir?'

'If you go, you cannot do better,' he said, in a tone which certainly signified a want of satisfaction at something; but that was not unprecedented in their discussions.

'But my habit!—O well, I can manage that. Then will you be ready very soon, Mr. Rollo?'

Dane was ready, there was no doubt of that; but Mr. Falkirk was on the verandah also, when the little mistress of Chickaree come forth to be mounted; and for the occasion the red squirrel went back to the old grave punctilio of manner he could assume when he pleased.

That was all the surrounding pairs of eyes could see; a grave deference, a skilful care in performance of his duties as Wych Hazel's squire. But to her, out of ken of all but herself, there was an expression of somewhat else; in every touch and movement and look, an indescribable something, which even to her inexperience said: 'Every bit of your little person, and everything that concerns it, is precious to me.' Not one man in many could have so shewn it to her, and hidden it from the bystanders. It was a bit of cool generalship. Then he threw himself on his own horse, like the red squirrel he was, and they moved off slowly together.

Well, she was not a vain girl, having quite too much of a tide in her fancies, notions and purposes to be stopping to think of herself all the while. So, though Rollo's manner did make her shy, it stirred up no self-consciousness. For understanding may sleep, while instincts are awake. It was very pleasant to be liked, and if she wondered a little why he should like her—for Miss Kennedy was certainly not blind to some of her own wayward imperfections—still, perhaps the wonder made it all the

pleasanter. She was not in the least inclined to take people's attentions in any but the simplest way (if only they were not flung at her by the basketful); and in short had no loose tinder, as yet, lying round to catch fire. Perhaps that says the whole. So she was about as grave and as gay, as timid and as bold, by turns, as if she had been seven years old.

'I promised you a canter,' said her companion, taking hold of her bridle to draw the grey aside from a bad place in the road. 'Next time you shall have a gallop —so soon as I can find what will do for you. Never mind for to-day.'

'You think this most respectable horse could so far forget himself as to canter?'

'Try.'

And away they went, with that elastic, flying spring through the air which bids spirits bound as well, and leaves care nowhere. For the old grey had paces, if his jollity was somewhat abated; and Vixen went provokingly, minding her business like one who thought she had better. Nevertheless it was a good canter.

'You will be a good rider,' said Rollo, when at length they subsided to a trot, stretching out his hand again and drawing Wych Hazel's reins a little further through her fingers. 'There, that is quite enough for him, steady as he is. Do you keep so free a rein in the household as you do in the saddle?'

'There has been no household—and no bridle, except for me.'

'Is Mr. Falkirk partial to a short rein?'

'What is "short?"' she said with a laugh. 'That is an utterly unsettled point. Are women never appointed guardians, Mr. Rollo?'

'Certainly,' said Rollo, gravely. 'Always, when they marry.'

She glanced at him, doubting whether he might be laughing at her.

'But I mean as Mr. Falkirk was.'

'Not often; but it occasionally happens. I congratulate you that your case was not such.'

'Ah, you do not know!' she said quickly, with a sort of outbreak of impatience.

'You don't know either,' said he.

'Yes I do. Not much about women to be sure—I have known very few. But I do know Mr. Falkirk, and love him dearly, and think a great deal more of him than you possibly can, Mr. Rollo.'

'I have thought a great deal about him,' said Rollo, in a sort of dry, innocent manner. 'But I will tell you—a man's guardianship leaves you a moral agent; a woman's changes you into a hunted badger; and if you were of some sorts of nature it would be a hunted fox. You know I have been under guardianship too?'

'Yes, but I thought it was Dr. Maryland's?' she said looking at him with astonished eyes. 'And you speak—Ah, you do not know, as I said, after all. You never wanted anything that a man could not give you.'

He laughed a little, his eye brightening and changing as he looked at her with a very winning expression.

'I had all that a man could give me. Dr. Maryland was father and mother in one, gentle and strong. But I have been in wardship under a woman too, partially, and it was as I tell you. Dr. Maryland would say: "Dane, don't go there," or "let that alone," and I *did*, except when a very wicked fit got hold of me. But *she* would stick a cushion with pins, to keep me out of it,

and if she wanted to keep a cup from my lips she rub bed gall where my lips would find it.'

'*Two* guardians!' said Wych Hazel; 'so that queer woman at Catskill thought *I* had. But it is a great deal harder to have a man find fault with you, nevertheless.'

'Why?' said Rollo, laughingly and seriously too.

'They are so quick in their judgments,' said the girl; 'so sure about the evidence. The jury agree without retiring, and sentence is passed before you are summoned to attend your own trial. You are out at play; you suddenly find yourself convicted of manslaughter in the fourth degree—or the fiftieth; it makes no difference.' The words came out with her usual quick emphasis, and then Miss Hazel remembered that one or two of her words were suggestive. She flushed very much, drooping her head.

'Coroner's inquest?' said Rollo, with a mixture of gentleness and fun. But she made no answer, unless by the soft laugh which hardly let itself be heard. He stretched out his hand again, laying it this time lightly upon hers, altering its bearing.

'Curb him in a little more,' said he, 'a little—so. Now touch him gently on the shoulder. What is it you think you miss so much in a man's guardianship?'

She looked round at him then—one of her girlish, searching looks, resolving perhaps how far it was safe to be confidential.

'A good many things, Mr. Rollo,' she answered, slowly. 'I do not believe you could understand. But I would rather have fourteen lectures from Mrs. Bywank than just to hear one of Mr. Falkirk's stiff "Miss Hazels."

'I cannot remember any lectures from Mrs. Bywank,'

said Rollo, looking as if his recollections in that quarter were pleasant—'which were not as soft as swansdown. But here we are coming to Moscheloo. How much do you know about fishing?'

'Rather less than I do about anything else. O, I remember Mrs. Bywank said she used to know you.'

'Mrs. Bywank is an old friend. In the times when I had, practically, two guardians—though only Dr. Maryland held the position officially—when there was nobody at Chickaree, I used to go nutting in your woods and fishing in the same brook which will, I hope, give me some trout to-day; and when I was thoroughly wetted with a souse in the water, or had torn my clothes half off my back in climbing to the tops of the trees, I used to carry my fish and my difficulties to Mrs. Bywank. She cooked the one and she mended the other; we eat the fish in company, and parted with the promise to meet again. Seems to me I ought to have had lectures, but I didn't get them from her.'

'Well, that is just it,' said Hazel, with her earnest face. 'She understood.'

'Understood what?' said Rollo, smiling.

'Things,' said Hazel, 'and you.'

'There's a great deal in that. Now do you want another canter?'

There was a mile of smooth way between them and the grounds of Moscheloo; a level road bordered with Lollard poplars. The grey went well, spite of his age and steadiness, and Vixen behaved her prettiest; but she was not much of a steed after all, and just now was shewing the transforming power of a good rider. And the rider was good company. They came to the open gate of Moscheloo, and began to ascend more slowly the

terraced road of the grand entrance. The house stood high; to reach it the avenue made turn after turn, zig zagging up the hill between and under fine old trees that overshadowed its course.

'Here we are,' said Rollo, looking up toward the yet distant house. 'How many people do you suppose there will be here that know anything about fish!'

'Why, it is a fishing party!' said Wych Hazel. 'I suppose I am the only one who does *not* know.'

'I will tell you beforehand what to expect. There will be a great deal of walking, a good deal of luncheon, a vast deal of talk, and a number of fishing rods. I shouldn't be surprised if you caught the first fish. The rest will be dinner.'

'And you will reverse that,' said Wych Hazel,—'little dinner and much fish.'

'Depends,' said Rollo. 'I am going to look after Mr. Falkirk, if he is in my neighbourhood.'

'Look after him!—Let him learn how it feels?' she said, with a laugh.

'Not just in that sense,' said Rollo, smiling. 'Only keep him from getting lost in the woods.'

'He has nothing to do in the woods till I come,' said Wych Hazel. 'And I thought you said you were off for a day's fishing?'

'I'll combine two pleasures—if I can.'

'What is the other?' she said, looking at him.

'Woodcraft.'

A tinge came up in her cheeks that might have been only surprise. She looked away, and as it were tossed off the first words that came. Then with very sedate deliberation:

'Mr. Rollo, I do not allow *anybody* to practice wood

craft among my trees without my special oversight. Not even Mr. Falkirk.'

'Suppose Mr. Falkirk takes a different view,' said Rollo, also sedately, 'am I answerable? Because, if that is your meaning, I will tell him he undergoes my challenge.'

'He is not to cut a tree nor a branch till I come home.'

'Suppose we arrange, then, for a time when you will come out and give a day to the business. Shall we say to-morrow?'

'O yes, I agree to that.'

'There shall not be a tree cut, then, till to-morrow. And to-morrow you shall have a lesson. Now here we are.'

CHAPTER XVI.

FISHING.

SEVERAL people were on the steps before the door, watching and waiting for them. The house shewed large and stately ; the flight of steps imposing. Hot-house plants stood around in boxes ; the turf was well shaven ; the gravelled road in order ; the overhanging trees magnificent. Moscheloo was a fine place. As the riders approached the door, Mme. Lasalle came forward, pouring forth welcomes, and invitations to Rollo. But after dismounting Wych Hazel, and so disappointing the gentleman who wanted to do it, Rollo excused himself and set off down the hill again. Mme. Lasalle turned to Wych Hazel, and led her, with flying introductions by the way, to the stairs and up to a dressing-room.

'It is quite charming to see you, and to think that Chickaree is inhabited and has a mistress—it makes Moscheloo, I assure you, several degrees brighter. Now my dear, what will you have ?—is it nothing but to take off this habit-skirt ?—let me undo it. What an odd mortal that is, that came with you !'

But to that Wych Hazel answered nothing. The light

riding skirt and jacket taken off, left her in green from head to foot. A daring colour for a brunette. But her own tint was so clear and the mossy shade of her dress was so well chosen, that the effect was extremely good. She looked like a wood nymph.

'Charming!—vraie Française'—said Madame, softly. 'That is a coquettish colour, my dear—are you of that character!'

'I am not sure that I know my own character yet,' Hazel said, laughing a little.

'Ah! that's dangerous. You don't know your own character?—then do you read other people's? Rollo—do you know him well?'

Mme. Lasalle was somewhat officiously but with great attention stroking into order one or two of Wych Hazel's curls which the riding had tossed.

'O, I dare say I shall make new discoveries, Mme. Lasalle.'

'He's the best creature in the world, everybody likes him; but—Oh dear! well I suppose all young men are so; they all like power. Did you notice that Miss Powder down stairs, that I introduced to you?'

'Hardly.'

'You had not time. She's a sweet creature. Oh, no, you hadn't time; but I want you to see her to-day. I have a little plan in my head.' And Mme. Lasalle left the curls and whispered with a serious face. '*She's* the young lady Rollo paid so much devotion to before he went abroad. Everybody knew that; and I know he liked her; but then, you see, he went off, and nothing came of it; but it's a pity, for Mrs. Powder would have been much pleased, I know, with her large family of daughters—to be sure, she has married two of them now;—but what

is worse,' (in a lower whisper) 'Annabella would have been pleased too; and she hasn't been pleased since. Now isn't it a shame?

Wych Hazel considered the matter. With a curious feeling of disbelief in her mind, which (without in the least knowing where it came from) found its way to her face.

'I wonder she would tell of it!'

'My dear, she didn't; only one sees, one can't help it. One sees a great many disagreeable things, but it's no use to think about it. It was nothing very bad in Rollo, you know; he has that way with him, of seeming to like people; but it don't mean anything, *except* that he does like them. O, I know that he liked her—and I am going to make you accomplice in a little plot of mine. I won't tell you now—by and by, when you have seen Annabella a little more. I would have asked Dane to join our party to-day, but I didn't dare—I was afraid he would guess what I was at. Now, my dear, I won't keep you up here any longer. Pardon me, you are charming! If Dane sees much of you, I am afraid my fine scheming will do Annabella no good!' And shaking her head gaily, the lady ran down stairs followed by Wych Hazel.

There was a great muster then of fishing-rods and baskets; and everybody being provided, the company was marshalled forth, each lady being under the care of a gentleman, who carried her basket and rod. Wych Hazel found herself without knowing how or why, leading the march with Mr. Lasalle. He proved rather a sober companion. A sensible man, but thoroughly devoted to business, his French extraction seemed to have brought him no inheritance of grace or liveliness—unless Mme. Lasalle had acted as an absorbent and usurp-

ed it all. He was polite, and gave good host-like attention to his fair little companion ; but it was as well for her that the walk presently sufficed of itself for her entertainment. They went first across several fields, where the sun beat down freely on all their heads, and divers fences gave play to the active and useful qualities of the gentlemen. Suddenly from the last field they went down a grassy descent—and found themselves at the side of a brook.

Well, it was a good-sized brook, overhung with a fine bordering of trees that shaded and sheltered it. The ladies cried 'lovely!'—and so it was, after the sunshiny fields on a warm June morning. But this was not the fishing ground. The brook must be followed up to the woods whence it came. And soon the banks became higher and broken, the ascent steeper, the trees closer ; no longer a mere fringe or veil to the fostering waters. Fields were forgotten ; the brook grew wild and lively, and following its course became a matter of some difficulty. Sometimes there was no edge of footing beside the stream ; they must take to the stones and rocks which broke its way, or cross it by fallen trees, and recross again. The woods made a thicket of wildness and stillness and green beauty and shady sweetness, invaded just now by an inroad of fashion and society.

Like a sprite Wych Hazel led the van, making her way over rocks and through vine tangles and across the water, after a fashion attainable by no other feet. Mr. Lasalle had no trouble but to follow ; had not even the task of hearing exclamations or being entertained ; for Wych Hazel had by no means acquired that amiable habit of society which is full dress upon all occasions. To-day she was like a child out of

school in her gleeful enjoyment, only very quiet. So she flitted on through the mazes of the wood and the brook, making deep remarks to herself over its dark pools, perching herself on a rock for a backward look at Miss Powder, and then darting on. The party in the rear, struggling after, eyed her in the distance with various feelings.

> 'The flower she trod on dipped and rose,
> 'And turned to look at her !—'

So quoted Metastasio Simms, who played the part of cavalier to Mme. Lasalle, and of poet and troubadour in general.

'There steals over me, Madame' said another cavalier, 'the fairy tale remembrance of a marvellous bird with green plumage—which flitting along before the traveller did thereby allure him to his captivity. Are you pledge for Miss Kennedy's good faith ? '

' I am pledged for nothing. I advise you to take care of yourself, Mr. May—I have no doubt she is dangerous. Haven't we come far enough ? Do run down the line, and tell them all to stop where they are ; we must not be too close upon one another. And when you come back I will reward you with another commission.'

While Mr. Simms was gone down the brook, however, Mme. Lasalle permitted the pair next below to pass her and go up to stop Mr. Lasalle and Wych Hazel from proceeding any further. So it came to pass that the highest group on the stream was composed of four instead of two ; and the additional two were Stuart Nightingale and Miss Annabella Powder. Now the fishing rods were put into the ladies' hands ; now their cavaliers attentively supplied their hooks with what was supposed

to be bait, and performing afterwards the same office for their own, the brook presently had the appearance, or would to a bird's-eye view, of a brook in toils.

'What do we expect to catch, sir?' asked Miss Kennedy of Mr. Lasalle, as she watched his motions and dropped her own line in imitation.

'If I were a member of the firm, I should say, "all hearts," mademoiselle, without doubt.'

'For shame, Mr. Lasalle!' cried Miss Powder.

'Fish are made to be caught, mademoiselle,' said Mr. Lasalle, throwing his own line again.

'For shame, Mr. Lasalle! How many hearts do you think one lady wishes to catch?'

'No limit that I know'—said the gentleman serenely.

'Well, but—are there no other fish in this brook?' said Wych Hazel.

'Miss Kennedy makes small account of the first kind,' said Stuart, laughing. 'That sport is old already. There must be difficulty to give interest, Lasalle, you know.'

'You gentlemen are complimentary,' said Miss Powder.

'Upon my word, I said what I thought,' replied the first gentleman.

'Miss Kennedy,' called Stuart out from his post down the brook; 'should compliments be true or false, to be compliments? Miss Powder is too indignant to be judge in the case.'

'I do not see how false ones can compliment,' said the lady in green, much intent upon her line. 'There! —Mr. Lasalle—is that what you call a bite?'

It was no bite.

'But people need not know they are false?' pursued Stuart.

'Well,' said Wych Hazel, looking down at him, 'you were talking of what things *are*—not what they seem.'

'You may observe,' said Mr. Lasalle, 'that most people find it amusing to get bites—if only they don't know there's no fish at the end of them.' Mr. Lasalle spoke feelingly, for he had just hooked and drawn up what proved to be a bunch of weeds.

'But where there is,' said Wych Hazel. 'There! Mr. Lasalle, I have got your fish!' and swung up a glittering trophy high over the gentleman's head.

'The first fish caught, I'll wager!' cried Stuart; and he looked at his watch. 'Twenty-seven minutes past twelve. Was that skill or fortune, Miss Kennedy?'

'Neither, sir,' observed Mr. Simms, who had wandered that way in search of a hook. 'There was no hope of Miss Kennedy's descending to the bed of the brook —what could the fish do but come to her? Happy trout!'

'I am afraid he feels very much like a fish out of water, nevertheless,' said Wych Hazel, eyeing her prize and her line with a demure face.

Alas! it was the beginning and ending of their good fortune for some time. Mr. Simms went back to his place; Mr. Lasalle disengaged the fish and rearranged the bait; and all four fell to work, or to watching, with renewed animation; but in vain. The rods kept their angle of suspension, unless when a tired arm moved up or down; the fishers' eyes gazed at the lines; the water went running by with a dance and a laugh; the fish laughed too, perhaps; the anglers did not. There were spicy wood smells, soft wood flutter and flap of leaves, stealing and playing sunbeams among the leaves and the tree stems; but there was too much Society around the brook, and nobody heeded all these things.

'Well, what success?' said Mme. Lasalle coming up after a while. 'What have you caught? One little fish! Poor little thing! Is that all? Well, it's luncheon time. Lasalle, I wish you'd go and see that everybody is happy at the lower end of the line; and I'll do your fishing meanwhile. Oh, Simms has almost killed me! Stuart! do take charge of that basket, will you?'

Mr. Nightingale receiving the basket from the hands of a servant, inquired of his aunt what he was to do with it.

'Mercy! open it and give us all something—I am as hungry as I can be. What have you all been doing that you haven't caught more fish? My dear,' (to Wych Hazel), 'that is all you will get till we go home; we came out to work to-day.'

And Stuart coming up, relieved her of her fishing rod, found a pleasant seat on a mossy stone, and opened his basket.

'As the fish won't bite—Miss Kennedy, will you?'

'If you please,' she said, taking a new view from her new position. 'How beautiful everything is to-day! Certainly I have learned something about brooks.'

'And something about fishing?'

'Not much.'

'The best thing about fishing,' said Stuart, after serving the other ladies and coming back to her, 'is that it gives one an appetite.'

'Oh, then you have not studied the brook.'

'Certainly not,' said he, laughing, 'or only as one studies a dictionary—to see what one can get out of it. Please tell me, what did you?'

'New thoughts,' she said. 'And new fancies. And shadows, and colours. I forgot all about the fish sometimes.'

'You are a philosopher?' said Stuart, inquisitively.

'Probably. Don't I look like one?'

He laughed again, with an unequivocal compliment in his bright eyes. He was a handsome fellow, and a gentleman from head to foot. So far at least as manners can make it.

'I do not judge from appearances. Do you care to know what I judge from?'

'Your judgment cannot have been worth much just now,' said Wych Hazel, shaking her head. 'But I am willing to hear what led it astray.'

'What led it,—not astray,—was your calm declining of all but true words of service.'

'O, had you gone back *there?*' she said. 'I think it takes very little philosophy to decline what one does not want.'

'Evidently. But how came you not to want what everybody else wants? There is the philosophy, you see. If you bring all things down to bare truth, you will be Diogenes in his tub presently.'

'"Bare Truth!"—said the girl. 'How people say that, as if truth were only a lay figure!'

'But think how disagreeable truth would often be, if it were not draped! Could you stand it? I beg pardon! I mean, not you, but other people!'

'I *have* stood it pretty often,' said the girl with a grave gesture of her head.

'Impossible! But did you believe that it was truth?'

'Too self-evident to be doubted!'

Stuart laughed, again with a very unfeigned tribute of pleasure or admiration in his face. 'It is a disagreeable truth, said he, 'that that is not a good sandwich.' Permit me to supply its place with something else. Here

is cake, and nothing beside that I can see; will you have a piece of cake? It is said to be a feminine taste.'

'No, not any cake,' said Hazel, her eyes searching the brook shadows. 'But I will have another sandwich, Mr. Nightingale—if there is one. At least, if there is more than one!'

'Ah,' said Stuart, 'you shall have it, and you shall not know the state of the basket. Those two people have so much to talk about, they have no time to eat!' And he took another sandwich himself.

'Is that old woman in the cottage a friend of yours?'

'I never saw her before the other day.'

'She lost no time! A little garrulous, isn't she? I made acquaintance there one day when I went in to light a cigar. I have a mind to ask you to give me the distinction I am ready to claim, of being your oldest acquaintance in these parts. I think I shall claim it yet. Let me look at the state of your hook.'

They dropped their lines in the brook again, but no fish were caught, and fish might cleverly have run away with their bait several times without being found out. The conversation was lively for some time. Stuart had sense and was amusing, and had roamed about the world enough to have a great deal to say. The pair were not agreeably interrupted after half an hour by Mme. Lasalle, who discovered that Wych Hazel was fishing where she could get nothing, and brought her down the brook to the close neighbourhood of Miss Powder, where Stuart's attentions had to be divided. But so the two girls had a chance to see something of each other; a chance which Miss Powder improved with manifest satisfaction. She was a wax-Madonna sort of beauty, with a sweet face, fair, pure, placid, but either somewhat im-

passive or quite self-contained in its character. Her figure was good, her few words showed her not wanting in sense or breeding.

Wych Hazel was by this time far enough out of the reserve of first meetings to let the exhilarating June air and sunshine do their work, and her voice, never raised beyond a pretty note, was ready with laugh and word and repartee. Now studying her hook, now questioning Miss Powder, now answering Mr. Nightingale, and then seriously devoted to her fishing,—she shewed the absolute sport of her young joyous nature, a thing charming in itself, even without so piquant a setting. It was no great wonder that a gentleman now and then took ground on the opposite side of the brook, and directed his eyes as if the fish would only come from that point of the shore where Miss Kennedy sat. This happened more and more, as by degrees the line of fishers was broken and the unskilled or unsuccessful, tired of watching the water, gave it up, and strolled up the brook to see who had better luck. And so few fish were the result of the day's sport, so many of the company had nothing better to do than to look at what somebody else was doing, that by degrees nearly the whole party were gathered around that spot where Wych Hazel had caught the first fish. They were relieved, perhaps, that the effort was over ; perhaps the prospect of going home to dinner was encouraging ; certainly the spirits of all the party were greatly enlivened by something. Mme. Lasalle's ears heard the pleasant sound of voices in full chorus of speech and laughter all the way home.

It was rather late before Madame's carriage could be ordered to take Miss Kennedy home. Mme. Lasalle herself attended her, and would suffer the attendance

of no one else. A young moon was shedding a delicious light on the Lollard poplars past which Wych Hazel had cantered in the morning. It was an hour to be still and enjoy, and think ; but did Mme. Lasalle ever think? She ceased not to talk. And Wych Hazel, after her day of caressing and petting and admiration, how was she? She had caught the first fish ; she had been queen of the feast ; she had given the first toast ; she had received the first honours of every eye and ear in the company. Her host and hostess had lavished all kindness on her ; ladies had smiled ; and gentlemen, yes, six gentlemen had come down the steps to put her into the carriage. But if she wanted to think, Mme. Lasalle gave her no chance.

'Where shall you go to church on Sunday, my dear?' she asked on the way.

'Dr. Maryland's, of course, ma'am.'

'O, that's where we all go, of course ; delightful creature that he is. And yet he rebukes every single individual thing that one does. Dear Dr. Maryland, he's so good, he don't see what is going on in his own family. Do you know, it makes me unhappy when I think of it. But, my dear, that's the very thing I wanted to talk to you about,—Miss Powder, you've seen her ; aren't you pleased with her ? '

'She was very pleasant to me.'

'She is that to everybody, and her mother is a very fine woman. Now, my dear, you will be at your pleasure, seeing your friends at Chickaree—couldn't you contrive to bring Dane and Annabella together again ? '

'I ? ' said Wych Hazel, surprised. 'Why, I do not know how to contrive things for myself.'

'O ! I do not mean anything complicated—that never

does well; but you could quite naturally, you know, give them opportunities of seeing each other pleasantly. I think if he saw her he might come round again and take up his old fancy; and you being a stranger, you know, might do it without the least difficulty or gaucherie; they would meet quite on neutral ground, for nobody would suspect that you were *au fait* of our country complications. I dare not stir, you see; that was the reason I could not invite Dane to our fishing to-day. I knew it wouldn't do. This was my plot for you, that I told you about—what do you think? It would be doing a kind thing, and hurting nobody, at any rate.'

It did come to Miss Kennedy's mind that Mr. Rollo was quite capable of 'contriving,' his own situations; but she answered only, 'Would it, ma'am?'

'It couldn't do any harm, you know. And you are the very person to do it. And then, if your plan should succeed, it would have another good effect, to put Primrose Maryland in safety.'

If it had been daylight instead of moonlight, Mme. Lasalle might have seen the young face at her side knit itself into a very perplexed state indeed at these words; and the more Hazel thought the deeper she got.

'It would be quite natural, you know,' Mme. Lasalle went on after a pause, 'that a girl like her should be fascinated, and Rollo, without meaning to do any harm, would give her cause enough. He *is* fascinating you know, but he is too cool by half. Dr. Maryland, of course, never would see or understand what was going on; and Primrose is so sweet and inexperienced. I know her sister was very uneasy about it before Rollo went away—so long ago. I fancy his going was partly thanks to her care.'

Closer and closer came the dark brows together, until by degrees her extremely fancy-free thoughts took a turn. 'What a fuss! what was Mme. Lasalle talking about? "Fascinating," forsooth!—she should like to see anybody that could fascinate her. And so the whole thing grew ludicrous, and she laughed, her soft ringing, girlish laugh.

'What a pirate he must be, Mme. Lasalle. A true Dane! Do many of that sort live on shore?'

'Take care!' said the lady in a different tone—'dangers that are slighted are the first to be run into.'

The carriage stopped at that moment, so Wych Hazel had no need to reply. She watched Mme. Lasalle drive off, took a comprehensive view of the moon for a minute, and then pirouetting round on the tips of her toes she flashed into the sitting room and favoured Mr. Falkirk with a courtesy profound enough for her grandmother.

CHAPTER XVII.

ENCHANTED GROUND.

MR. FALKIRK was sitting with the paper in the tea-room at Chickaree. A good lamplight gave him every temptation to lose himself in its manifold pages, but somehow the temptation failed. Mr. Falkirk had been walking the floor for part of the evening; going then to one of the long windows and throwing it open—there were no mosquitoes at Chickaree—to look out at the moonlight, or perhaps to listen for the sound of wheels, but the Summer stillness was only marked by the song of insects and the light stir of leaves, and Mr. Falkirk went back to his musings. His hand caressed his chin sometimes, in slow and moody deliberation. No doubt the change was a serious one, from the quiet, unquestioned care of a schoolgirl, to the guardianship of a bright, full-winged butterfly of humanity. That does not half express it. For to the airy uncertainty of butterfly motions, his ward certainly added the intense activities of a humming bird, and the jealous temper, without the useful proclivities, of a honey bee. I think Mr. Falkirk likened her to all these in his meditations; and

his brows knit themselves into a persistent frown as he walked. For all that, when the wheels of Mme. Lasalle's carriage grated on the gravel sweep, Mr. Falkirk sat down to the table and the newspaper, and as Wych Hazel opened the door and walked in, Mr. Falkirk looked up sedately. Then his face unbent, a very little, but he waited for her to speak.

'Good evening, my dear Mr. Falkirk!' Mr. Falkirk was not morose, but he made little answer beyond a smile.

'I perceive you have been pining for my return, sir,' said Miss Hazel advancing airily; 'but why you do not revive when I come, *that* puzzles my small wits. Are you overjoyed to see me safe home, Mr. Falkirk?'

'I wait to be certified of the fact, Miss Hazel.'

She came to a low seat before him, silently crossing her arms on her lap.

'What are the developments of fortune, to-day, Miss Hazel?' said her guardian with a relaxing face.

'A number of gentlemen, sir, and one fish. Which I caught. There were some ladies, too, but they came less in my way.'

'Um! So I understand you catch all that come in your way?'

'Only the fish, sir. But you should have heard the people thereupon! One cried, "Happy fish!"—and another, "Happy Miss Kennedy!"—And yet I suppose we had both of us known more ecstatic moments.'

'And what is your impression of fishing parties, judging from this specimen?'

'O, I was amused, of course. But the brook was delicious. You know, it was all new to me, Mr. Falkirk.'

'Like the fairy-tale you wanted?' said her guardian smiling.

She smiled, too, but her answer was only a sweet, 'Are you glad to see me here, sir?'

'I am glad if you are glad, Miss Hazel. I did not suspect that any genie or enchanter had got hold of you yet.'

'Only "if,"' she said to herself. 'I wonder how it feels to have anybody care for one very much!' But no word of that came out.

'Are *you* glad to get home, Miss Hazel?'

'Yes, sir. The drive was rather stupid.'

'Did you come alone?'

'I had Madame in person, and with her all the unquiet ghosts of the neighbourhood, I should judge,'—added Miss Hazel thoughtfully slipping her bracelets up and down.

'Scandal, eh?' said Mr. Falkirk. 'And yet the drive was stupid!'

'Incredible, sir, is it not? But you see, I had been ever so long face to face with the brook!—'

'I do not know that I am fond of scandal,' said Mr. Falkirk; 'and yet I should like to know what particular variety of that favourite dish Madame chose to serve you with. And in the mean time, to relieve the dryness of the subject, Miss Hazel, will you give me a cup of tea?'

She sprang up, and began to busy herself at once with her home duties, but did not immediately answer his question. Until she came round to his side, bringing the fragrant and steaming cup of tea, and then apparently thoughts were too much for her, and she broke forth:

'Why don't people marry each other if they want to, Mr. Falkirk?' she said, standing still to put the question. 'And if they *don't* want to, why do not other people let them alone?'

Mr. Falkirk shot one of his glances at the questioner from under his dark brows, and sipped his tea.

'There might be a variety of answers given to your first query, Miss Hazel. People that want to marry each other are proverbially subject to hindrances—from the days of fairy tales down to our own.'

'They always do it in fairy tales, however.'

'They very often do it in real life,' said Mr. Falkirk gravely.

'Well, sir?—then why cannot they be left to take care of themselves, either way? It is such fudge!' she said, walking back to her place and energetically dropping sugar in her own cup.

'Who is Mme. Lasalle trying to take care of?'

'Me, last, sir. Warning me that things laughed at become dangerous. In which case I shall lead a tolerably risky life.'

'Who is Mme. Lasalle warning you against?' demanded Mr. Falkirk hastily.

'My dear sir, how excited you are over poor Mme. Lasalle! I presumed to laugh at some of her fancy sketches, and then of course she rapped me over the knuckles. Or meant it!' said Miss Hazel, slightly lifting her eyebrows.

'But I observe you do not answer me, my dear.'

'No, sir,—if you will allow me to use my own judgment, I think I had better not. Let me have your cup, Mr. Falkirk please, and I'll put more sugar in this time.'

Mr. Falkirk finished his tea and made no more observations. He was silent and thoughtful,—moody, his ward might have fancied him,—while the tea-things were cleared away, and afterwards pored over the newspaper and did not read it. At last, when silence

had reigned some time, he lifted his head up and turned round to where Wych Hazel sat.

'I have been considering a difficulty, Miss Hazel; will you help me out?'

'Gladly, sir, if I can.' She had been sitting in musing idleness, going over the day perhaps, for now and then her lips curled and parted, with various expressions.

'We have come, you are aware, Miss Hazel, in the course of our progress, to the Enchanted Region;—where things are not what they seem; jewels lie hid in the soil for the finding, and treasures are at the top of the hill; but the conditions of success may be the stopping of the ears, you know; and lovely ladies by the way may turn out to be deadly enchantresses. How, in this time of dangers and possibilities, can my wisdom avail for your inexperience? that is my question. Can you tell me?'

'Truly sir,' she answered with a laugh, 'to get yourself out of a difficulty, you get me in! My inexperience is totally in the dark as to what your wisdom means.'

'Precisely,' said Mr. Falkirk; 'so how shall we do? How shall I take care of you?'

'You have always known how, sir,' she answered with a grateful flash of her brown eyes.

'When I had only a little Wych Hazel to take care of, and the care depended on myself,' Mr. Falkirk said, with just an indication of a sigh stifled somewhere. 'Now, I can't get along without your coöperation, my dear.'

'Am I so much harder to manage than of old, sir? That speaks ill for me.'

'My dear, I believe I remarked that we are upon

Enchanted ground. It does not speak ill for you, that you may not know a bewitched pumpkin from a good honest piece of carriage maker's work.'

'No, sir. It is the pumpkin variety for which Mr. Rollo is to find mice?'

'I have taken care of your affairs at least,' said Mr. Falkirk gravely. 'There is nothing about *them* that is not sound. I wish other people did not know it so well!' he muttered.

'It is only poor little me,' said Wych Hazel. 'Never mind, sir,—in fairy tales one always comes out somehow. But I am sure I ought to be "sound" too, if care would do it.'

'Will you help me, Hazel?' said Mr. Falkirk, bending towards her and speaking her name as in the old childish days.

'Gladly, sir,—if you will shew me how. And if it is not too hard,' she said with a pretty look, well answering to her words.

'I wish you had a mother!' said Mr. Falkirk abruptly. And he turned back to the table, and for a little while that was all the answer he made; while Wych Hazel sat waiting. But then he began again.

'As I remarked before, Miss Hazel, we are come upon bewitched ground in our search after fortune. You spoke of two classes of people a while ago, if you remember—people that want to marry each other and people that *don't*.'

'Yes sir. Which are there most of?'

'*Being* upon bewitched ground, it might happen to you as to others—mind, not this year, perhaps, nor next; but it might happen—that you should find yourself in one of these two, as you intimate, large classes. Sup

pose it; could you, having no mother, put confidence in an old guardian?'

Very grave, very gentle Mr. Falkirk's manner and tone were; considerate of her, and very humble concerning himself.

'Why, sir!'—she looked at him, the roses waking up in her cheeks as she caught his meaning more fully. Then her eyes fell again, and she said softly—'How do you mean, Mr. Falkirk? There is nobody in the world whom I trust as I do you.'

'I have never a doubt of that, my dear. But to make the trust avail you or me, practically, could you let me know the state of affairs?'

She moved restlessly in her chair, drawing a long breath or two.

'You say such strange things, sir. I do assure you, Mr. Falkirk, I am ensconced in the very middle of one of those classes. And that not the dangerous one,' she added with a laugh, though the flushes came very frankly. 'If *that* is what you are afraid of.'

'You are in about as dangerous a class as any I know,' said Mr. Falkirk, dryly; 'the class of people that everybody wants to marry. Miss Hazel, you are known to be the possessor of a very large property.'

'Am I, sir? And is that what makes me so attractive? I thought that there must be some explanation of so sweeping a compliment from your lips.'

A provoked little smile came upon Mr. Falkirk's lips, but they grew grave again.

'So, Miss Hazel, how are you to know the false magician from the true knight?'

'He must be a poor knight who would leave the trouble on *my* hands,' said the girl, with her young ideas

strong upon her. 'If he does not prove himself, Mr. Falkirk, "I'll none of him!"'

'How shall a man prove to you that he does not want Chickaree and your money, my dear?'

'Instead of me. I think—I should know,' she answered slowly, so much absorbed in the question that she almost forgot its personal bearing. 'Mr. Falkirk, false and true cannot be just alike?'

'Remember that in both cases so much *is* true. The desire to win your favour, and therefore the effort to please, are undoubted.'

'Mr. Falkirk, you must be the assayer! Suppose you tell me now about all these people here, to begin with. I have not seen much that reminded me of magic *yet*,' she said with a curl of her lips.

'What people?' said Mr. Falkirk, hastily.

'What people? Oh, I forgot—you were not at Mme. Lasalle's to-day. But I thought you knew everybody here before we came.'

'I shall not be with you everywhere,' Mr. Falkirk went on; 'that would suit neither me nor you. The safe plan, Miss Hazel, would be, when you think anybody is seeking your good graces, to ask me whether he has gained mine. I will conclude nothing of *your* views in the matter from any such confidence. But I will ask you to trust me thus far,—and afterwards.'

'You mean, sir, whether—he has gained mine or not?'

Mr. Falkirk answered this with one of his rare smiles, shrewd and sweet, benignant, and yet with a play of something like mirth in the dark, overhung eyes. It was a look which recognized all the difficulty of the situation and the subject, for both parties.

'I am afraid the thing is unmanageable, my dear,' he

said at last. 'You will rush up the hill without stopping your ears, after some fancied "golden water" at the top; and I shall come after and find you turned into some stone or other. And then you will object very much to being picked up and put in my pocket. I see it all before me.'

She laughed a little, but shyly; not quite at ease upon the subject even with him. Then rose up, gathering on her arm the light wraps she had thrown down when she came in.

'I must have been always a great deal of trouble!' she said. 'But I do not want to give you more.' Mr. Falkirk, won't you kiss me and say good night to me, as you used to do in the old times? That is better than any number of fastenings to your pocket, to keep me from jumping out.'

Once it had been his habit, as she said; now long disused. He did not at once answer; he, too, was gathering up a paper or two and a book from the table. But then he came where she stood, and taking her hand stooped and kissed her forehead. He did not then say good night; he kissed her and went. And the barring and bolting and locking up for the night were done with a more hurried step than usual.

CHAPTER XVIII

COURT IN THE WOODS.

MISS WYCH—my dear—all in brown? said Mrs. Bywank doubtfully, as her young charge was arraying herself one morning for the woodcraft. Some rain and some matters of business had delayed the occasion, and it was now a good week since the fishing party.

'Harmonious, isn't it?' said Hazel.

'But, my dear—it looks—so sombre!' said Mrs. Bywank.

'Sombre?' said the girl, facing round upon her with such tinges of cheek and sparkles of eye that Mrs. Bywank laughed, too, and gave in.

'If it puts Mr. Falkirk to sleep, I can wake him up,' said Wych Hazel, busy with her loopings. 'And as for Mr. Rollo'—

'Mr. Rollo!—is he to be of the party?' said the housekeeper.

'I suppose,—really,—he is *the* party,' said Wych Hazel. 'Mr. Falkirk and I scarcely deserve so festive a name by ourselves.'

'And what were you going to say of Mr. Rollo?'

'O nothing much. He may go to sleep if he chooses —and can,' added Miss Wych, for the moment looking her name. But the old housekeeper looked troubled.

'My dear,' she began—'I wouldn't play off any of my pranks upon Mr. Rollo, if I were you.'

'What is the matter with Mr. Rollo, that his life must be insured?' said Wych, gravely confronting her old friend with such a face that Mrs. Bywank was again betrayed into an unwilling laugh. But she returned to the charge.

'I wouldn't, Miss Wych! Gentlemen don't understand such things.'

'I do not think Mr. Rollo seems dull,' said the girl, with a face of grave reflection. 'Now, Byo—what are you afraid I shall do?' she went on, suddenly changing her tone, and laying both hands on her old friend's shoulders.

'Why, nothing, Miss Wych, dear!—I mean,'—Mrs. Bywank hesitated.

'You mean a great deal, I see,' said Wych Hazel. 'But do not you see, Byo, I cannot hang out false colours? There is no sort of use in my pretending not to be wild, because I *am*.'

Mrs. Bywank looked up in the young face,—loving and anxious.

'Miss Wych,' she said, 'what men of sense disapprove, young ladies in general had better not do.'

'O, I cannot follow you there,' said Wych Hazel. 'Suppose, for instance, Mr. Rollo (I presume you mean him by "men of sense") took a kink against my brown dress?'

Not very likely, Mrs. Bywank thought, as she looked at the figure before her. If Hazel had been a wood

nymph a week ago she was surely the loveliest of brown fairies to-day. But still the old housekeeper sighed.

'My dear, I know the world,' she began.

'And I don't, said Hazel. 'I am so glad! Never fear, Byo, for to-day at least I have got Mr. Falkirk between me and mischief. And there he is this minute, wanting his breakfast.'

But to judge by the housekeeper's face as she looked after her young mistress down the stairs, that barrier was not quite all that could be wished. However, if impenetrability were enough for a barrier, Mr. Falkirk could have met any inquisitions that morning.

He came to breakfast as usual; but this morning breakfast simply meant business. He ate his toast and read his newspaper. With the ending of breakfast came Rollo. And the party presently issued forth into the woods which were to be the scene of the day's work.

The woods of Chickaree were old and fine. For many years undressed and neglected, they had come at last to a rather rampant state of anarchy and misrule. Feebler, though perhaps not less promising members were oppressed by the overtopping growth of the stronger; there was an upstart crowd of young wood; and the best intentioned trees were hurting each other's efforts, because of want of room. It was a lovely wilderness into which the party plunged, and the June morning sat in the tops of the trees and laughed down at them. Human nature could hardly help laughing back in return, so utterly joyous were sun and sky, birds and insects and trees altogether. They went first to the wilderness through which Rollo and Wych Hazel had made their way on foot one morning; lying near to the house and in the immediate region of its owner's going and coming. Herein were

great white oaks lifting their heads into greater silver pines. Here were superb hemlocks threatened by a usurping growth of young deciduous trees. There were dogwoods throwing themselves across everything; and groups of maples and beeches struggling with each other. As yet the wild growth was in many instances beautiful; the damage it was doing was beyond the reach of any but an experienced eye. Here and there a cross in white chalk upon the trunk of a tree was to be seen.

The three walked slowly down through this leafy wild till they were lost in it.

'Now,' said Rollo to the little lady in brown, 'what do you think ought to be done here?'

'I should like to make ways through all this, if I could. True wildwood ways, I mean,—that one must look for and hardly find; with here and there a great clearance that should seem to have made itself. What sort of a track would a hurricane make here, for instance?'

'A hurricane!' said Mr. Falkirk, facing round upon his ward.

'Rather indiscriminate in its action,' observed Rollo.

'The clearance a hurricane makes in a forest,' Mr. Falkirk went on, 'is generally in the tree tops. The ground is left a wreck.'

'Any system of clearing that I know, brings the trees to the ground,' said Wych Hazel. 'But I mean—I like the woods dearly as they are, Mr. Falkirk; but *if* I meddled with them, then I would have something to shew for it. I would have thoughts instead of the trees, and vistas full of visions. If anything is cut here, it ought to be in a broad hurricane track right down to the West, where

"The wind shall seek them vainly, and the sun
Gaze on the vacant space for centuries."

I do not like fussing with such woods.'

'What thought is expressed by a wide system of devastation?' asked Rollo, facing her.

'Power. Do not you like power, Mr. Rollo?' she said with a demure arch of her eyebrows.

Rollo bit his lips furtively but vigorously, and then demanded to know if Napoleon was her favourite character in history.

'No,' said Wych Hazel—'he did not know what to do with his power when he had it. A very common mistake, Mr. Rollo, you will find.'

'Don't make it,' said he, smiling.

'What are you talking about?' said Mr. Falkirk, turning round upon them. 'Miss Hazel, we are here in obedience to your wishes. What do you propose to do, now we are here? Do you know what needs doing?'

'What does, Mr. Falkirk?—in your opinion?' She came close to him, linking her hands upon his arm. 'Tell me first, and then I will tell you.'

'There must be a great many trees cut, Miss Hazel; they have grown up to crowd upon each other very mischievously. And a large quantity of saplings and underbrush must be cleared away. You see where I have begun to mark trees for the axe.'

'Truly, sir, I do! Mr. Falkirk, that bent oak is a beauty.'

'It will never make a fine tree. And the oak beside it will.'

'Well—it is to be congratulated,' said Miss Hazel, pensively. 'But what is to become of my poor woods, at that rate? There is an elm with a branch too many

on one side ; and a birch keeping house lovingly with a hemlock. If "woodcraft" means only such line-and-rule decimation, Mr. Falkirk—'

'I don't know what *you* mean by woodcraft, my dear. *I* mean, taking care of the woods.'

'And *that* means,' added Rollo, 'an intimate knowledge of their natures, and an affectionate care for their interests ; a sympathetic, loving, watchful insight and forecast.'

Wych Hazel gave him a little nod of approval.

'Don't you see, sir ?' she went on eagerly. 'You *must* have a bent tree now and then, because it is twice as interesting as the straight ones. And if you cut down all the bushes, Mr. Falkirk, you will clear *me* out,' she added, laughing up in his face.

'You might grant her so much, Mr. Falkirk,' said the other gentleman. 'A bent tree now and then ; and all her namesakes. Certainly they ought to stand.'

Mr. Falkirk's answer was to take a few steps to a large white pine tree, and make a huge dash of white chalk upon its broad bole. Then he stepped back to look again. Action was more in his way than discussion to-day. Rollo began to get into the spirit of the thing ; and suggested and pointed out here and there what ought to come down and what ought to be left, and the reasons, with a quick, clear insight and decision to which Mr. Falkirk invariably assented, and almost invariably in silence. Deeper and deeper into the wood they worked their way ; where the shade lay dark upon the ferns and the air was cool and spicy with fragrance, and then where the sunlight came down and played at the trees' foot. For a while Wych Hazel kept pace with their steps ; advising, countermanding, putting in her

word generally. But by degrees she quitted the marking work, and began to flit about by herself; plunging her little fingers deep into moss beds, mimicking the squirrels, and—after her old fashion—breaking out from time to time into scraps of song. Now Mr. Falkirk's ears were delighted with the ringing chorus:

'Wooed and married and a'—
'Wooed and married and a';
'Wasna she vera weel aff
'That was wooed, and married, and a'?

Then a complete hush seemed to betoken sudden recollection on the singer's part; that was quite too private and confidential a matter to be trilled out at the top of one's voice. Presently again, slow and clear like the tinkle of a streamlet down the rocks, came the words of Aileen Asthore:

'Even the way winds
'Come to my cave and sigh; they often bring
'Rose leaves upon their wing,
'To strew
'Over my earth, and leaves of violet blue;
'In sooth, leaves of all kinds.'

It was a very sweet kind of telegraphing; but the two gentlemen, deep in the merits of a burly red oak, took no notice how suddenly the song broke off, nor that none other came after it. And when at last they bethought themselves of the young lady truant, and stopped to listen where she might be, they heard a murmur of tongues very different indeed from the silvery tones of Wych Hazel. And somewhat hastily retracing their steps, came presently into distant view of an undoubted little court, holden easily in the woods.

Miss Kennedy, uplifted on a grey rock, was the centre thereof, and around her some six or eight gentlemen paid their devoirs in most courtier-like fashion. On the moss at her feet lay Mr. Kingsland, with no less a companion than Mr. Simms—black whiskers, white Venetian collar and all. Three or four others, whom Mr. Falkirk did not know, were lounging and laughing and paying attentions of unmistakable reality; while Stuart Nightingale, who had come up on horseback, stood nearest of all, leaning against the rock, his hat off, his horse's bridle upon his arm.

The consequence of this revelation was a temporary suspension of woodcraft, properly so called; another sort of craft, it may possibly have occurred to the actors therein, coming into requisition. Mr. Falkirk at once went forward and joined the group around the rock. More slowly Rollo's movements also in time brought him there. They could see, as they came nearer, a fine example of the power of feminine adaptation. Was this the girl to whom Mr. Falkirk had discoursed the other night? How swiftly and easily she was taking her place! And though a little downcast and blushing now and then, beneath the subtle power of eyes and tongue, yet evidently all the while gathering up the reins and learning to drive her four in hand. Over the two at her feet she was openingly queening it already; over the others—what did Wych Hazel see concerning them, that curled her lips in their soft lines of mischief? Some exquisite hot-house flowers lay in her lap, and a delicate little basket by her side held strawberries—red, white and black—such as the neglected Chickaree gardens had never seen.

'Why, there is your venerable guardian, Miss Ken-

nedy!' drawled out Mr. Kingsland, as Mr. Falkirk came in sight. 'How charming! Patriarchal. And who is that beyond?—Dane Rollo!—as I am a Christian!'

'Evidently then, somebody else,' said Mr. May. 'Who is it, Nightingale?'

But Mr. Nightingale knew his business better than to reply; and Dane presently spoke for himself. It was the Dane of the Mountain House, courteous and careless; no fellow of these gentlemen, nor yet at all like Mr. Falkirk, a guard upon them. Mr. Falkirk's brows had unmistakeably drawn together at sight of the new comers; Rollo stood on the edge of the group, indifferent and at ease, after his wonted fashion in general society.

'You are making almost your first acquaintance with these beautiful woods?' Stuart remarked, to the little mistress of them, breaking the lull that Mr. Falkirk's arrival had produced.

'How old is your own, sir?' said Mr. Falkirk.

'I—really, I don't know—I have shot here a little; before you came, you know; when it was all waste ground.'

'I remember getting lost in them once, when I was a child;' said Wych Hazel,—'I think that was my first acquaintance. It was just before we went away. And Mr. Falkirk found me and carried me home. Do you remember, sir?'

But Mr. Falkirk was oblivious of such passages of memory in the present company. He gave no token of hearing. Instead, he cruelly asked Mr. Kingsland how farming got on this summer? And Mr. Kingsland, by way of returning good for evil, gave Mr. Falkirk a

shower of reports and statistics which might have been true—they were so unhesitating. Through which rain of facts Mr. Falkirk could just catch the sound of words from Mr. May, the sense of which fell upon Miss Kennedy's ear alone. Until Rollo at her side broke the course of things.

'I beg your pardon! Miss Kennedy,' (in an aside) 'I see Primrose and her father coming. Shall I stop them?'

'Why, of course!' she said, springing to her feet, 'What a question!'

The two recumbent gentlemen rose at once.

'Do you always wear wildwood tints, Miss Kennedy?' asked Mr. Simms, looking up admiringly at the slim figure. 'I thought the other day that green was matchless, but to-day—'

'Yes,' said Wych Hazel, 'but if you would just please stand out of my way and let me jump down. I want to see Dr. Maryland.'

The gentleman laughed and retreated, and disregarding the half dozen offered hands, Hazel sprang from her rock and stood out a step or two, shading her eyes and looking down the woodland, where Rollo had disappeared to meet the approaching carriage. The thicket was so close just here that the carriage road though not far off was invisible. Down below Rollo had caught a glimpse of the well known little green buggy creeping up the hill; and in another few minutes its occupants appeared coming through the trees. Wych Hazel had hold of their hands almost before they had sight of her.

'I thought you had given me up, Dr. Maryland,' she said, 'and were never coming to see me at all!'

'Two days,' said the Doctor benignly, 'Two fair days my dear, since we took breakfast together. I have not been very delinquent. Though it seems I am not the first here. Good morning, Mr. Kingsland!—how do you do, Mr. Burr?—how do you do, Mr. Sutphen?—Mr. May? Are you holding an assembly here, my dear?' And by that time Dr. Maryland had worked round to Mr. Falkirk, and the hands of the two gentlemen closed in an earnest prolonged clasp; after the approved method gentlemen have of expressing their estimation of each other.

'Miss Kennedy is pretty sure to "hold" whoever comes near her, sir,' said Mr. Burr.

'I can certify that the "assembly" is quite powerless, Doctor—if it will be any relief to your mind,' said Mr. Kingsland. While Hazel, with Prim's hand in hers, was eagerly speaking her pleasure.

'What are you doing?' said Primrose under her breath and looking in some astonishment at the gathering.

'O, nothing—talking,—they wanted to know how I got home,' said Wych, an amused look betraying itself. Then quitting Primrose, she went forward a little to receive the farewell addresses of several gentleman who preferred to see Miss Kennedy alone. The group began to clear away. Prim's eye watched her, in her graceful, pretty self-possession, as she met and returned the parting salutation; and then went over by some instinct to where another eye was watching her too, with a contented sparkle in its intentness. That was only a second, though. Rollo had no mind to have all the world know what he was thinking about; and even as her glance found him, his turned away. The strangers being at last disposed of, those remaining began a slow

procession towards the house. But a parting word of Mr. Nightingale's must be noted.

'Any chance for a ride to the wood to-morrow?' he said, with tones so modulated that he thought his words safe. And she answered:

'O, my horses have not come. There will be little riding for me yet a while.

'And these are the Chickaree woods?' said Dr. Maryland, as they walked on. 'How beautiful they are! Are you very happy, Hazel, in the hope of being the mistress of all this?'

'Why I thought—I call myself the mistress now, sir. Is it an uncertainty dependent on my good behaviour?' she said with a laugh.

'You know you are not of age, my dear; but I suppose Mr. Falkirk gives you all the essentials of dominion. Do you feel at home yet?'

'Very much! You know, sir, I have just a little remembrance of the old time—when mamma was here—to begin with. But how heedless I am!' she said, abruptly putting the little basket which had been swinging from her hand into the hands of Dr. Maryland. 'There, sir,—will you take some refreshment by the way?' Then turning to Primrose, Miss Kennedy laid the fragrant weight of hot-house flowers upon her.

'Are these from your garden?' said Primrose, somewhat bewildered. While Dr. Maryland, putting his fingers without scruple in among the black and white strawberries, asked in an approving tone of voice: 'Have you been picking these yourself, my dear?'

'I—picked them up, sir,' said Hazel with the laugh in her voice. 'Not off the vines, however. They are

hothouse flowers,' she answered to Primrose. 'When my houses are in order you shall have them every day.'

'They are very good,' said Dr. Maryland gravely, eating away. 'Where did you get them, my dear?'

'Mr. May brought them, sir,' said the girl, looking down now, and walking straight on.

'Mr. May!' echoed Dr. Maryland. 'How comes Mr. May to be bringing you strawberries? And those flowers too?' glancing over at Primrose's full hands.

'No, sir, Mr. Burr brought the flowers.'

'You are a fearful man for asking questions, sir, said Rollo, with a flash of fun in his face.

'Questions?' said the doctor, picking out the black strawberries abstractedly,—'I've a right to ask her questions. The strawberries are good!—but I wish Mr. May had not brought them.'

'So would he, if he knew you were eating them, sir.'

'I've eaten enough of them,' said Dr. Maryland, seeming to recollect himself. 'They are very good; they are the finest strawberries I have seen.' And he handed the basket to Mr. Falkirk, who immediately passed it over to Rollo. Rollo balanced the basket on his fingers and carried it so, but put never a finger inside.

'I am afraid your head will be turned, Hazel, my dear,' said Dr. Maryland, 'if the adulation has begun so soon. What will you do when you are a little better known?'

'Ah!' said Hazel, with an indescribable intonation, 'ask Mr. Falkirk that, Dr. Maryland. Poor Mr. Falkirk! he is learning every day of his life what it is to know me "a little better!"'

'I can imagine that,' said Dr. Maryland, quite gravely 'My dear, what a beautiful old house you have!'

The June day, however, was so alluring that they could not make up their minds to go inside. On the basket chairs in the low verandah they sat down, and looked and talked. Primrose did not talk much—she was quiet; nor Mr. Falkirk—he was taciturn; the burden of talk was chiefly borne by Wych Hazel and the doctor. In a genial, enjoying, sympathising mood, Dr. Maryland came out in a way uncommon for him! asked questions about the woods, the property, the old house; and delighted himself in the beauty that was abroad in earth and sky.

'My dear,' he said at last to Wych Hazel, 'you have all that this world can give you. What are you going to do with it?'

'Have I?' she said, rather wistfully. 'I thought I was looking for something more. What could I do with it, sir? You know Mr. Falkirk manages everything as well as can be, now.'

'Are you looking for something more?' said Dr. Maryland, tenderly. 'What more are you looking for, Hazel?'

'Suppose I should tell you I do not quite know, myself, sir?'

'I should say, my dear, the best thing would be to find out.'

'I shall know when I find it,' said the girl. 'If I find it.'

'"To him that hath shall be given!" One of the best ways, Hazel, to find more is to make the best use of what we have.'

The girl left her seat, and kneeling down by Dr. Maryland, laid her hand on his shoulder.

'I mean,' she said, dropping her voice so that only the doctor could hear, 'not more of what people call much; but something, where I have nothing. To belong to somebody—to have somebody belong to me.'

'Ah, my dear,' said the doctor, wistfully, 'I am afraid Primrose wouldn't do.'

'I have wanted her ever since she took me in out of the rain, and did not wonder how I got wet,' said Hazel laughing but dropping her voice again.

'If you had her, my dear, you would then want something or somebody else.'

'Maybe you do not understand me, sir,' she said, a little eager to *be* understood, and pouring out confidences in a way as rare with her as it was complimentary to her hearer. 'I am not complaining of anybody. I know Mr. Falkirk is very fond of me—but he likes to keep me off at a respectful distance. Only a few nights ago, I was feeling particularly good, for me, and rather lonely, and I just asked him to kiss me for good night—and it made him so glum that he has hardly opened his lips to me ever since!' said Wych Hazel in an aggrieved voice.

'Perhaps Mr. Falkirk has something upon his mind, my dear!' said Dr. Maryland, with raised eyebrows and an uncommon expression of *fun* playing about the lines of his mouth. 'It is not always safe to conclude that coincident facts have a relation of cause and effect.'

'No—' said the girl, 'I suppose not. But I stood there all by myself and heard him turn the keys and rattle the bolts—and then I ran upstairs to find Mrs. Bywank,—and of course she couldn't speak for a tooth-

ache. And then I felt as if there was nobody in all the world—in all my world—but me!'

Dr. Maryland looked tenderly upon the young girl beside him, yet uncomprehendingly. Probably his peculiar masculine nature furnished him with no clue to her essentially feminine views of things.

'I dare say, my dear,' he said,—'I dare say! The best cure for such a state of feeling that I know, would be to begin living for other people. You will find the world grow populous very soon. And one other cure,'—he added, his eye going away from Wych Hazel into an abstracted gaze towards the outer world;—'when you can say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."'

The little hand upon his shoulder stirred,—was lifted, and laid down again. Somehow she comprehended him better than he did her. Then with a sudden motion Hazel took off a luminous bracelet—one of the three she always wore, and laid it across Dr. Maryland's hand.

'Did mamma ever shew you that, sir?' she said. 'She had it made just for me. And then my wrist was so small that it would go twice round.'

It was a string of twelve stones, all different, all cut and set alike; each long parallelogram fitting rather closely to the next on either side; the hues—opaque, translucent, clouded—flashed and gleamed with every imaginable variation of colour and shade. The doctor looked at it in silence. Then spoke.

'What did she mean by it, Hazel, my dear? I do not catch the interpretation.'

She turned it a little in his hand, until the light fell on the gold framing beneath the gems, and Dr. Mary-

land could read the fine graven tracery:—"The first, a jasper."

'Ah!' he exclaimed with new interest, 'I see.' And he took up the chain of stones and turned it over and over, rather passed it through his fingers like a rosary, studying the stones and murmuring the names of them.

'"The wall of the city had twelve foundations,"' he said at last, giving the chain back, with a look of light and love combined; '"and in the wall were twelve gates, and each several gate was one pearl; and the streets were gold, like unto transparent glass, and nothing that defileth shall by any means enter there, but those that are washed in the blood of the Lamb." I like that, my dear.'

His look made all the application his words did not. Presently he rose up and asked Wych Hazel if he might go into her library? A book was there, he thought, that he wanted to look at. Hazel guided him in, but then he dismissed her and she went back to Primrose on the verandah. Slowly back,—softly fingering her bright stones, soberly thinking to herself the motto upon the clasp:—"In hope of eternal life."

'What were you talking to papa about?' said Primrose, putting a loving hand into Wych Hazel's. The two other gentlemen were speaking together at a little distance. 'I thought you looked troubled; but I could not hear, for Duke was talking to me.'

'Dr. Maryland should have been the troubled one, part of the time,' said Hazel, bringing her other hand upon Prim's, 'for I asked him to give you to me.'

'What would become of him and Duke?' said Primrose smiling.

'Really, Mr. Rollo did not enter into my calculations!' said Wych Hazel, coming back with a rebound into her everyday self. 'Does he require much time and care bestowed upon him?'

'Don't you think all men do?'

'I do not know all men,' said Wych Hazel. 'Mr. Falkirk does not get it. But does Mr. Rollo *live* at your house?'

'Why of course, when he's here. He always did, you know. And O, Duke helps me. It is twice as easy to take care of papa, when I have him in the house, too. But Hazel, I am going to get *you* to help me,—in another way—if I can.'

'What way?' said Hazel. 'Then if Mr. Rollo is so helpful, he might take care of Dr. Maryland altogether, and you could come to take care of me.'

Primrose laughed.

'O men cannot get along as women can—don't you know that?' she said. 'No, I want you for my Sunday school. What's the matter?'

These last words were caused by a diversion of the speaker's thoughts. For she had noticed, while speaking, that a man had come in haste to the place where the two gentlemen were standing; and that after a very few words Mr. Falkirk had thrown on his hat and gone down the grassy slope with the messenger; while Rollo had turned as suddenly and was coming towards them.

CHAPTER XIX.

SELF-CONTROL.

ROLLO came up with the grave, business look of one who has serious matters on hand.

'A messenger has come,' he said, speaking to Wych Hazel, 'to say that one of the men has met with an accident.'

He could see how the shock struck her, but she made no exclamation, only her hands met in a tight clasp as they had done in the woods' fire. She faced him silently, waiting more words.

'I don't know yet how bad it is. I am going to see; and I will come back to you by and by.'

'Where?—and who?' she asked.

'In the wood-cutting. It is Reo.' He spoke as a man who speaks unwillingly.

Hazel gave a little cry at that, and turning suddenly flew into the house. The next thing was the flutter of her light foot outside among the trees. But, overtaken the next minute, she was stopped by a hand on her arm and held fast. However Dane spoke very gently

'Miss Hazel—you had better not go yourself.'

'I am going,' she said, struggling to disengage herself. 'Mr. Rollo!—'

'Stop,' he said gently and steadily. 'Miss Hazel—I shall not let you go.'

In her excitement she hardly took in more than the mere fact of his words, and dropping everything she had in her hand, Hazel took hold of his fingers and began to loosen them with her own, which had a good deal of will in them, if they were small. The immediate effect was to secure the imprisonment of both her hands in a clasp that was stronger than her's. I hardly think Rollo disliked it, for he smiled a little as he spoke:

'Listen,' he said,—'Miss Hazel, I shall not let you go down yonder. I will bring you news as soon as I can—but you must stay here with Rosy. Don't you see?' he added very gently, as he turned about and walked toward the house with her, putting one little hand on his arm while other hand still held it fast,—don't you see, you could do nothing just yet? And I take this upon myself—I shall not let you go. You must stay here and take care of Rosy, till I can come back to you.'

'I will not,' she said, stopping short again. 'I will go! It is my right! Where should a woman be? And—Oh!' she cried with a change of tone, 'it is Reo!—And he will want things—and he will want me!'

'Not yet,' said Rollo; 'it is not time for either yet. He shall want nothing, I promise you, that he ought to have. But you must be good and stay with Rosy.'

He spoke as a brother might speak to a little sister of whom he was very fond, or—brothers do not often take just that tone. Primrose, looking on, knew very well what it meant. Wych Hazel was in far too much commotion of mind to discern anything. She had yielded to superior strength,—which indeed she could

not gracefully resist; and then there came over her heart such a flood of grief, that for the last few steps she was quite passive; though giving no sign but the quiver that touched her mouth, and went and came again. But at Rollo's last words she drew herself up defiantly.

'Do you expect to stand here and hold me all day?' she said.

'No,' he said gravely, now meeting her look,—'I expect you to have self-control and womanly patience, and to let me go and do my part, until it is time for you to do yours. Will you?'

'I shall do what I think best. The question is none of yours, Mr. Rollo. Self-control!—I have a little!' she said under her breath.

'Do you mean to keep me here,' he said gravely and quietly, 'when I may be so much wanted elsewhere? You would be in the way there, but I am needed. Still, you are my first care. Must I stay here to take care of you? or will you promise me to be good and wait quietly with Primrose, until I bring you word.'

His eye went to Primrose as he ended, in a mute appeal for help. And Prim came near and laid her hand softly on Wych Hazel's shoulder.

'Do, dear Hazel!' she said. 'Duke knows; you may trust him.'

It was indescribable the way she freed herself from them both, as if to be touched, now, was beyond the bounds of endurance. Prim's words Hazel utterly ignored, but something in the other's claimed attention.

'Go! go!'—she said hurriedly. 'Go and do your part!—If you had been content with doing that at first, we should have had no trouble.' She wrapped her

arms round one of the light verandah pillars, and leaning her head against it gave look nor word more.

Rollo staid for none, but dashed away down the slope and was lost in the woods. Primrose stood near Wych Hazel, very much at a loss indeed; but too troubled to be still.

'Dear Hazel!' she ventured, in a very soft voice—'don't feel so! What is the matter?'

'Did you not hear?'

'Yes; but Hazel dear, you know hardly anything yet; there may be very little to be troubled about. The accident may be very slight, for all you know. I always think it is best to wait and see; and then have your strength ready to work with.'

'My strength has been extremely useful to-day.'

'What do you mean, dear?' said Primrose, softly endeavoring to coax the hands and arms away from the verandah pillar. 'Look here—look up and be yourself again. Maybe there is very little the matter. Wait and see.'

'Wait!'—Hazel repeated. 'People talk as if waiting was such easy work!'

'I never said it was easy,' said Primrose gently. 'But some people have to wait all their lives.' There was the very essence of patience in the intonation.

'I should think their lives would be short.'

Primrose sighed a little and was silent. Perhaps she thought that those who had little occasion to practise the grace were unreasonable. But I think she only remembered that the one near her was very unpractised.

'Forgive me—I do not mean to—be—' the girl faltered out, the tremor coming back to her voice. 'But

Reo !—' And with that, pain and disappointment and chagrin joined forces; and quitting her pillar, Hazel dropped down by one of the great wicker chairs, and laying her head there burst into a passion of weeping that almost made Primrose wish for the hard-edged calm again.

So she stood passively by until the storm was spent; and Dr. Maryland having satisfied his book quest, came out again, awakening to the fact that it was time he and Primrose were jogging homeward. Primrose took him aside and explained the situation of affairs, after which Dr. Maryland, too, forthwith betook himself down the slope in the direction where Mr. Falkirk and Rollo had disappeared. After a little interval of further suspense he was seen coming back again. He reported that Reo was not much hurt; had been a good deal bruised, and the accident had threatened to be serious; but after all no great harm was done. Primrose nevertheless begged that her father would go home without her; she could come with Duke, she said.

Dr. Maryland's wagon had not been brought round, however, when a very different vehicle appeared, climbing the steep; and Primrose proclaimed that Mrs. Powder was at hand. The carriage drew up before the verandah, and from it descended the ex-Governor's lady, and two young ones—Miss Annabella and another. Mrs. Powder was a stately lady, large and dignified;—those two things do not always go together, but they did in her case. She was extremely gracious to all the members of the little group she found gathered to receive her. Then, as Dr. Maryland was going, she sat down to talk to him about some business which engaged her. So the two older persons were a little removed

from the rest. Miss Annabella did nothing but look handsome and calm, after her wont; but her younger sister was of different mettle.

'And so this is Chickaree?' she said, gazing up and down and about, at the old house and its surroundings. What a delightful old place! And are you the mistress of it, really—without being married, you know? How splendid! I always think that's the worst of being married—you lose your liberty, you know, and there's always somebody to bother you; but to have a grand place, and house, and all that, and to be mistress, and *have no master!*—I declare,' Miss Josephine cried, throwing up hands and eyes, 'it's as good as a fairy tale. And much better, for it don't all vanish in smoke in a minute. Oh, don't you feel like a fairy princess in the midst of all your magnificence? You look like it, too!' added the young lady, surveying the person of her hostess. 'Ain't you proud?'

Hazel's spent and past excitement had left her rather pale and grave, so that she was doing the honours with an extra touch of stateliness. Self-control was trying its best now, for she had not the least mind that anybody should know it had ever been shaken. So she ordered lunch to be served out there on the verandah, and made Dr. Maryland wait for it, and talked to Miss Annabella; and now gave Miss Josephine a cool 'Proud! Is that what you call it?' which left nothing to be desired.

'I thought they said she was so brilliant?' remarked Miss Annabella, in an aside to Primrose. 'But I suppose *that* is with gentlemen.'

'What do *you* call it?' the younger Miss Powder went on. '*I* should be proud—awfully—if I had such a house and all. I'd take my time about being married.

Wouldn't you? Don't you think it is best to put off being married as long as you can?—not till it's *too* late, you know. The fun's all over then—don't you think so? —except the house, and carriage, and establishment, and giving entertainments, and all that. And you have got it all already. Oh, I should think you *would* make the men dance round?'

Wych Hazel had followed this rush of new ideas with a degree of amazement, which, before she knew, culminated in a merry laugh. But she was grave again immediately.

'Should you?' she said. 'How do you do it?'

'*Don't you know how?*' said the other girl, with an expression of insinuation, fun and daring which it is difficult to give on paper. She was a pretty, bright girl, too. The question would have been impudent if it had not been comical. 'I know you do!' she went on. 'You've got a good battery. I'd like to see you do it. I always do. It's such fun! All men are good for,' she exclaimed next, with a curl on her lip, 'except to carry one's parasol and things. Do you know Kitty Fisher?'

'Not even by name,' said Miss Kennedy, studying her guest as an entirely new species.

'She's a splendid girl. She's coming to Moscheloo next week; there'll be goings on then. People are so stupid here in the country, they want somebody to wake them up. Kitty's awfully jolly. Oh, what a lovely old house! Take me in and let me see it, won't you? Oh, what a lovely hall! What a place for a German! Oh, you'll give a German, won't you?'

'I do not know what I shall give, yet, Miss Powder.'

'I'm not Miss Powder! Annabella wouldn't thank you. She'd like me to be Miss Powder, though. Tell

me ; don't you think people could get along just as well if they weren't married ? Now there's my mother wants to marry us off as quick as she can ; and every other girl's mother is just the same. What do they do it for ? Oh, you've got a dreadful old guardian, haven't you ? Does *he* want you to get married ? Ain't it hateful to have a guardian ? I should think it would be awfully poky.'

'Did you never see Mr. Falkirk ? ' said Hazel gravely. Somehow this girl's talk made her extremely reticent. But that made little difference to Miss "Phinny." The next question was :

'Do you know Stephen Kingsland ? '

'Yes,'

'Don't you admire him ? Ain't he a catch, for some body ! But you know Stuart Nightingale, don't you ? '

Again Miss Kennedy said yes.

'Like him ? '

'Do you ? ' said Hazel.

'I think he's splendid ! He's so amusing ; and he's a *splendid* dancer. It's fun to dance with Stuart Nightingale. I don't very often get him, though. But you didn't answer me—do you like him ? '

'I am not much in the habit of answering people,' said Hazel frankly. 'You will find that out if you see enough of me.'

'Ain't you ? Why ? ' asked the young lady ingenuously.

'Because I do not like to be questioned. You perceive no fault can be found with my reasons,' she added with a smile.

'Then you do like him, I know. People are never afraid to tell their dislikes. Why !—is that '—

A broken-off inquiry here was never finished, the answer to it in fact being furnished by the coming near of Rollo whose distant appearance had first suggested it. He came up on the verandah, shook hands with Mrs. Powder, but gave the other ladies one of what Wych Hazel used to know, as his Spanish greetings; courteous and distant equally. Dr. Maryland had before this finished his colloquy with the ex-Governor's lady and departed. Rollo now took his place and talked to Mrs. Powder, while for a few minutes Annabella used her eyes, as much as she could, and Miss Phinny ceased to use her tongue.

Wych Hazel never knew by what instinct she worked her way through that first bit of time. Eager for more tidings, sure that her eagerness must not appear, she held her breath for one minute—then rose up cool and quiet, the young mistress of Chickaree.

'Yes,' she said, answering Phinny's half spoken words, 'it is Mr. Rollo. And of course he has had no luncheon.'

She summoned Dingee with a blast of her silver whistle (there were few bells at Chickaree) ordered up hot chocolate and fresh tea and relays of fruit and cream; and herself stepped forward to see them served.

'There are croquettes, Mr. Rollo,' she said,—'and Dingee will bring you cold beef. And with what may I fill your cup?'

Primrose, through her scattering talk with Miss Annabella, watched, as she could, these two people who were so strange to her simplicity. Here was Wych Hazel, a little while ago on the floor in a passion of tears; now, calm, self-possessed, and graceful. Prim-

rose had been very uncertain how she would meet Rollo the next time; with a kind of wonder she heard her friendly offer of chocolate and observed Rollo's perfectly cool and matter-of-course acceptance of it from her hands. It was something beyond Primrose. She waited to see how it would be when Mrs. Powder went away.

But a great many thoughts went in among the sugar that Primrose never guessed. Wych Hazel was anxiously waiting to have the good report about Reo confirmed, and would not shew her anxiety. But what did Prim mean by people's waiting all their lives? What did they wait for? Well, these two people needn't wait any longer for a meeting—that was one thing. *That* affair was well off her hands. Why hadn't Mr. Falkirk returned too?—Staying with Reo, perhaps, until she came, and she could not go, and could not ask. And now, of course, the Powders would just stay on, supplementing their lunch to bear Mr. Rollo company. Perhaps, though, it was just as well they were here when he came. Because she knew she ought to be furiously angry with him, and somehow that was never a *rôle* she could play. Before excitement reached that point, she always got hurt, or troubled, or timid—and just now she was too tired. If he told her to sit there and count her fingers, she should hardly have spirit to resist. However had he dared to take hold of said fingers as he had done!—and with that came a sudden rush to Miss Kennedy's cheeks which made her wish she could go for hot chocolate instead of Dingee. He had hindered her by sheer force. Gentle force,—and gentlemanlike,—but none the less true to its name. There was one of the peculiar advantages of being a woman! Or a girl. She should be stronger in full womanhood. But oh,

she was woman enough to take care of Reo!—and if Reo were dying, and Mr. Rollo did not want to have her go, he would sit calmly there and want more chocolate!—She glanced at him from under the long eyelashes, and another flush (of impatience this time) tinged her cheeks. But she did not stint him in sugar, nor make any mistakes with the cream. Then her eyes went away over the long slope, where birds and sunshine held their revels. Wait?—what did people wait for, 'all their lives?' And why did Dr. Maryland's last words come up to her again? And why did the aforesaid eyelashes grow wet? She was all shaken out of herself by the morning's work. She would send Dingee to inquire!—and not wait. But then if this strange man should order *him* back—and Dingee could not be relied on to go silently. No, she could not have a scene before all these people. And a wee bit of a sigh, well kept in hand, went to the compounding of Miss Phinny's third cup. 'Womanly patience?'—how was hers to be grown, yet? And what did he know about it, any way? She should like to see him thoroughly thwarted, for once, and see how much manly patience he had on hand. And another swift glance went his way; but with anxiety rousing up again, the glance lingered, and was more inquiring than she meant it should be.

Luncheon was really over at last. The Governor's lady said some gracious words of welcome to her young hostess, invited her to a dinner-party a few days off, and having ordered up her carriage, swept away with her daughters. What will be now? thought Primrose.

Rollo had put the ladies into their carriage, and stood long enough to let them get out of observation behind the woods; then he came up on the verandah and going

round the table sat down beside Wych Hazel. Primrose saw—did the other?—the easy motion which was universal with him, the fine figure, the frank, bright face. Primrose did not mean to watch, but she saw it all, and the look with which he sat down. It was not that of a man about to make an apology, neither had it any smile of attempted ingratiation. It was rather a sweet, confidential look of inquiry, which, however, went down through the depths of the brown eyes he was looking into, and rifled them of all their secrets. It was a sort of look before which a woman's eyes fall.

'Reo is not seriously hurt,' he said softly, when this point had been reached.

She bowed her head. 'So Dr. Maryland brought word. At least the *hope*.'

'He is only a good deal bruised. No bones broken, nor any other harm done. It might have been worse, and so the messenger who first came did not alarm us for nothing. One of the woodcutters had felled a large tree without giving due warning, or Reo had not heeded the warning; he was caught under the tree. But he escaped very well. He is at his own house, where he will have to keep his bed some days, I fancy.'

Another mute gesture. Perhaps the girl was not sure of herself after all the morning's work, and had no mind to risk another admonition about self-control.

'I am very glad,' she said gravely, after a minute.

'I am very glad. Mr. Falkirk has sprained his ankle,' he went on a little lower.

'Mr. Falkirk!'—

Hazel sprang up,—then as instantly sat down again. There should be no more strength used about her that day!

'Helping Reo?' she said.

'Not directly. He made a misstep, I think, among the confusion of branches cut and uncut with which the ground was encumbered; slipped off one of them, perhaps; somehow gave his foot a twist,—and there he is. That was the cause of my long delay.' He spoke, watching the little lady all the while.

'Why did he not come here?—it was nearer,' she said with some accent of impatience.

'No'—very gently—'we were nearer his cottage. I proposed bringing him,—where I was sure you would wish for him,—here, at once; but Mr. Falkirk laid his commands on me and on all concerned so absolutely that there was no choice. We carried him to his cottage; for he could not walk.'

'Just like Mr. Falkirk!'—then the impatience died away in a soft tone of pity. 'Not able to walk!'—

'He will be a prisoner for some time, I am afraid.'

Hazel made no answer to that; thoughts were crowding in thick and fast. What was *she* going to do, with Mr. Falkirk laid up? Would she be a prisoner too? Was she to live here in this great old house alone, by day as well as by night? They were rather sober thoughts that came.

'That's very bad for Hazel,' said Primrose, coming near and joining the group. Hazel held out her hand and got fast hold of Prim's. She was ready for the sympathy this time.

'Does he suffer very much, Mr. Rollo?'

'I don't think he minds that part of it; no, I left him in comparative comfort. I think his trouble is about you. And he ought to have come here!—but people don't always know what they ought to do. I am going

down there again presently to look after him and make sure that Gotham understands bandages.

'Gotham *thinks* he understands everything.'

'I'll just make sure on that point. Have you any commands before I go?'

'No, thank you,' she said, with just the lightest shade of hesitation, 'I think not.'

'Reconsider that, and give me my orders.'

'No—truly!' Hazel answered, looking up at him. How busy the thoughts were.

'I am going to Reo's first. Have you any commands there?' But she shook her head.

'No, Mr. Rollo, not any.'

He went off; and there was an interval somewhat quiet and untalkative between the two girls. Later, Rollo came back, reported both patients doing well, and carried Prim home with him.

'Did you think I was all ungrateful?' Hazel said, wrapping her arms round Prim. 'Well, I was *not*.'

CHAPTER XX.

BOUQUETS.

WYCH HAZEL stood alone on her broad steps, watching the others out of sight, and feeling alone, too. It must be nice to belong to somebody,—to have brothers and friends! Just for the moment, she forgot her now unwatched independence. But then she came back to business, and flew off up stairs. The brown dress could not stay on another minute,—was not the whole morning tucked away in its folds? That was the first thing. And the second thing was, that Miss Kennedy, in a cloud of fresh muslin and laces, came out again upon the steps, and, calling Dingee to follow her, began to speed away through the old trees at a sort of flying pace. It was late afternoon now; with lovely slant sunbeams and shadows falling across the slope, and a tossing breeze, and the birds at their evening concert. Fresh air, and action soon brought the girl up to concert pitch herself; and she went on like a very sprite, along a side wood path, avoiding the main approach, and so gained the lodge by a side door; and in a minute more stood by the bedside of her faithful old retainer. Hazel never knew at what cost to himself Reo managed to put out one hand far enough to receive her dainty fingers.

'My little lady!' he said fondly, 'I knew she would come.'

'O Reo—O Reo!—I am so sorry!' she said, her eyes growing wet.

'No need Miss Wych, dear,' said Reo, smiling at her, though his own eyes moistened to see hers.

'And it was just cutting those trees that I did not want cut!'

'Aye,—but they do want cutting though, Miss Wych, said Reo. 'Mr. Falkirk is right. And Mr. Rollo.'

How that name came up at every turn.

'Those trees are so big!' said Hazel with a shiver. 'I do not see how you ever got out again, Reo.'

'Never should, my little lady,' said Reo, 'only that there was somewhat between me and the tree.'

'Between you and the tree?' said Hazel. 'Do you mean another tree, that kept it off?'

'No, little lady,' said Reo, 'I mean the Lord's hand.' You see He's quicker than we are, and before I could jump or turn, His hand was there over me. And caught the tree, and let it touch me but just so much.'

Hazel stood looking at him.

'Suppose he had not put his hand there, Reo?' she said.

'Then it would have been under me, Miss Wych—that's all the difference,' said Reo, quietly. 'Only I should never have seen my little lady again in this life.'

'Well, you have got to see her a great many times,' said the girl, speaking fast because it was not easy to speak at all. 'I am coming to sing to you, and read to you, and to do all sorts of things.' And with a smile like a stray sunbeam she left the room, and after a minute with Mrs. Reo which straightway made *her* over, 'as

good as two,' Hazel flitted away up the hill again, as far as to Mr. Falkirk's cottage; walking in through the Summer-open doors upon his tea and toast, without the slightest warning. There she was all right. It was delightful to get the whip hand for once! And so, privately enjoying Gotham's dismay at her unannounced entrance, Wych Hazel stood by her guardian's side with a face of grave reprehension.

'Mr. Falkirk, I am really very much surprised at you!'

'H'm!—Not more than I am at myself, Miss Hazel. You are not ahead of me there.'

'Considering how much there is to do, sir; considering the unsettled state of the neighbourhood, and my extremely unprotected condition; that you should go dancing round among loose branches without a partner, passes all my small wits.'

Mr. Falkirk glanced up at her, a glance of momentary fun and recognition, though he was by no means in a sportive mood; that was easy to see.

'Will you sit down, Miss Hazel? You must play guardian now. Can your wits accomplish that?'

'Yes, sir, I thank you. Will you order me a cup and saucer, Mr. Falkirk? I have had no dinner, and could eat no lunch. And I know Gotham would see me starve before I had even a crust without your permission.'

'I'm sure, Miss 'Azel!—Mr. Falkirk knows'—began Gotham.

'What have you got, Gotham?—anything in the house? Be off, and get all there is—and be quick about it.'

'O, I do not want much, sir—just a slight supplement to the pleasure of seeing you,' said Hazel, with her gay laugh. 'Mr. Falkirk, don't you think it would be very nice to have Mrs. Saddler dust up that little bit of a

brown corner room for me? And then I could stay here with you all the time, and we would take splendid care of each other.'

'There's nothing there *but* a little brown room, my dear.'

'I do not care, sir. Mrs. Saddler must have a spare blanket among her stores. And I would leave word up yonder that I had unexpectedly gone away for a time.—And it would be fun,' said Miss Hazel, decidedly. 'Besides the other advantages.'

'What will happen to all the princes who are coming after the princess?'

'They will learn—self-control,' said Miss Hazel. 'I have been told lately that it is a good thing.'

'Not formerly?'

'The last time made the most impression, sir. As last times are apt to do.'

'Miss Hazel, I have a request to make to you,' Mr. Falkirk said, after allowing a minute or two of silence to succeed the last remark.

'What, sir? That I will not sing so loud in the little brown room as to disturb your repose? I can promise *that*.'

'You have not got your horses yet.'

'No, sir. I am sure I ought to know so much,' said the girl with a sigh.

'Rollo will see to it. You forget, my dear, we have been but a few days here. Miss Hazel, do you remember the story of the enchanted horse in the Arabian Nights?'

'With great clearness, sir. In everything but his appearance it was just the horse I should like.'

'Just the horse I am afraid of. The cavalier turned a screw and the lady was gone. I request that you will

mount nobody's steed, not even your own, without consulting me first that I may make sure all is safe. It is still more true than it was the other night that I require your co-operation to discharge my trust.'

'Why, of course I should consult you, sir!' she said, with some surprise.

'That is all, Miss Hazel. Rollo will give his oversight to the woods. Only don't engage yourself to anybody for a ride till you *have* consulted me. Do you agree to that form of precaution-taking?'

'Certainly, sir. I am sure I referred Mr. Morton to you at once,' said Miss Hazel, drinking her tea. And Mr. Falkirk, in a silence that was meditative if not gloomy, lay and watched her. It was a little book room where they were, perhaps the largest on that floor, however; a man's room. The walls all books and maps, with deer horns, a small telescope and pistols for a few of its varieties. Yet it was cheerful too, and in perfect order; and Mr. Falkirk was lying on a comfortable chintz couch. Papers and writing materials and books had been displaced from one end of the table for Hazel's tea. That over, the young lady brought a foot-cushion to the side of Mr. Falkirk's couch and established herself there, much refreshed.

'It is great fun to come to tea with you, sir! Now may I go on with business? or are you too tired?'

'Suppose I say I am too tired?' growled Mr. Falkirk, 'what will you do?'

Hazel glanced up at him from under her eyelashes.

'Wait, sir. I am learning to wait, beautifully!' she answered with great demureness. 'Then suppose I go and tell Mrs. Saddler about my room?'

'Go along,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'Give your orders.

You had better send up to the house for some furniture. You'll make Mrs. Saddler happy at any rate. I am not so sure about Gotham. But Gotham has too easy a life in general.'

They had a lively time of it in the other part of the house for the next half day. And so had Mr. Falkirk in his, for that matter: the sweet voice and laugh and song, somehow, penetrated to his study as grosser sounds might have failed to do. It was towards tea-time again when Wych Hazel presented herself in the study on the tips of her toes, and subsiding once more to her cushion glanced up as before at Mr. Falkirk.

'Has the fatigue of yesterday gone off, sir?'

'No; but I see the business has come. Can you be comfortable in your mousehole? Let us have the business, my dear. If it is knotty perhaps it will make me forget my ankle.'

'Ah!' she said remorsefully, 'I was talking of fatigue, sir—not of pain. Is the pain very bad?'

'No, my dear; but I was always inclined to the epicurean side of philosophy, and partial to anodynes; or even counter-irritants.'

'Whose bandage have you got on?' she said curiously.

'Whose? My own.'

'Dear sir, I do not mean as to the linen! Mr. Rollo was coming down to teach Gotham, and I wondered which of them took a lesson. That is all.'

'H'm! Ask Gotham,' said Mr. Falkirk.

'I wish I had been here to see,' said Wych Hazel. 'Never mind, I will next time. By the way, sir, did you leave any orders for me yesterday morning with anybody?'

'What do you mean, my dear?' said her guardian, rather opening his eyes. It is to be noted that though he growled and frowned as much as ever, there had come into Mr. Falkirk's mien an undoubted softening of expression since yesterday.

'I merely asked, sir. But now for business. Mrs. Powder is to have a grand explosion in the way of a dinner party next week. And she wants me to come and help touch off the fireworks. May I go?'

'What did you tell her?'

'That I would if you would, sir.'

'Is this the business?'

'Item the first, sir.'

'Well, my dear. Anything conditional upon my movements for some time to come will probably have to be vetoed. But you will have offers of a substitute.'

'The Marylands are going, sir.'

'Of course.'

'Well, Mr. Falkirk, suppose substitutes do offer,—what then?

'Then you will follow your pleasure, Miss Hazel.'

'Thank you, sir. The next item seems to be a mild form of this: a little evening party at Mrs. Gen. Merrick's. And Mrs. Merrick hearing of your accident, sent a note to say that Miss Bird would convey me to Merricksdale, safe and in good order.'

'Who is Miss Bird?'

'Don't you remember, sir? She came to see me the same morning the Lasalle party came.'

'There are a great many Birds,' said Mr. Falkirk, grumpily, 'and they are not all pigeons.'

'But, my dear Mr. Falkirk, however important such

natural history facts may be, they do not exactly meet the case in hand.'

'I don't know whether they meet it or no. Can't you go with Miss Maryland?'

'Not invited, sir.'

'How would you get back?'

'Mrs. Merrick takes charge of that.'

'And didn't think it necessary to inform you how or when?'

'It is only a small party, sir. I should expect to be back early.'

'That needs to be made certain, Miss Hazel, and stipulated for.'

'Well, sir, you shall name the hour.'

'Name it yourself; but be home by half-past eleven. Miss Hazel, I wish, till you have your own horses, you would not go to such places.'

There was a shade of disappointment in her face, but she answered steadily—

'I will not go, sir, if that is really your wish.'

'My dear, we must meet the enemy. In the progress of ladies seeking their fortune that is always understood. What next?'

She hesitated a moment, carefully dressing the petals of a carnation in her hand.

'The third item, sir, is—that if to-morrow afternoon I—will consent to put—my little foot,' said Miss Hazel. evidently mastering a laugh, 'inside the right phaeton —Mr. May will consent to drive.'

'Mr. May! Confound his impudence!' was the by no means doubtful utterance of Miss Hazel's guardian.

Hazel bit her lips and sat demurely waiting further developments.

'Chickaree is in a very exposed situation, Miss Hazel!' Mr. Falkirk remarked, with something a little like a sigh. While, as if to give effect to his words, two well-mounted horsemen at that moment went up the hill, exchanging greetings with the occupants of a landau that was just then making the descent. Wych Hazel looked and laughed.

'It is very comical!' she said. But her guardian was silent. He knew the Enchanted ground had to be met and passed. Perhaps he wished it were well over; but I think the present feeling of discontent relieved itself not even so far.

'And on the whole your three answers are, sir?—' said Hazel, after a pause.

'In your head,' Mr. Falkirk growled. 'You know what they are.'

'My dear sir! one would think they were in your foot!' But then she was silent, and then she began to sing. One thing and another, after her own fitful fashion, in the twilight; and business did not come up again. Only as she went to sleep that night, Miss Kennedy indulged in one profound reflection.

'No,' she said to herself, 'Dr. Maryland was right: Primrose would never do. Get her in a corner, and the most she can say is, "Duke knows."'

So drew on the night of Mrs. Merrick's party; and meantime a rainy day or two saved Mr. Falkirk some trouble, and left the cottage in comparative quiet. But as the night drew near, the clouds cleared away and the sun shone out, and fairer weather could not have been wished for, or wished away.

There had been a running fire of errands and messages between the cottage and the house on the hill, all

day. Miss Kennedy was constantly finding out something more that she wanted for the evening, and Dingee went back and forth with notes to Mrs. Bywank and waterproof-covered baskets in return, till Gotham at least lost patience.

'More duds for Miss 'Azel!' he said in displeasure, as Dingee appeared just at nightfall with a final basket. 'It's clean ridikerlous! One dress at a time ought to content any young lady.'

'Now I jes' tell you what, Mas' Gotham,' said Dingee, 'you ain't up to de situation. Pears like de whole countryside after my young mistis!'

Gotham gave a grunt in unsuccessful imitation of his master's growl.

'H'after'er,' he said. 'Looks more as if she was h'after them—wanting fourteen dresses at once.'

Dingee shewed his teeth from ear to ear.

'You bery wise man, Mas' Gotham!' he said. 'Spect now you can tell a feller all about dese yere.' And Dingee threw off the white paper which covered what he carried this time, and displayed to Gotham's astonished eyes a basket full of bouquets.

''Spect now dese yere growed in Missee Hazel's own greenhouse,' he said, tauntingly, 'seein' she ain't got none! Shouldn't wonder if dey started up spontanous like, arter de shower. How you tink, Mas' Gotham, hey?'

But Gotham was virtuously indignant.

'Miss' Azel'll get her head worse turned than it h'is now,' he said.

'Heads does turn, fact,' said Dingee, shaking his own. 'Jes' you watch 'em when de horseback gen'lemen dey goes by, Mas' Gotham, and you'll see de heads turn!'

But Gotham had watched enough already to know there was no mistake about that.

'Well,' he said, 'since h'it's 'ere, h'it's'ere, and 'll 'ave to stay, no doubt. I'll take it to the library.'

'Cotch him first!' said Dingee, moving a little out of reach. 'Where Missee Hazel?'

'Prinking 'erself h'up,' answered Gotham severely.

'Gotham telling fibs!' said the young lady in question, coming up behind him with her light tread. 'Perhaps he had better take *himself* to the library, and report to Mr. Falkirk. What do you want of me, Dingee? I thought everything was here.'

Dingee had adroitly covered his basket again, but now he drew near and displayed his treasure, adding messages of a somewhat adorned nature, while Wych Hazel read the cards attached to the bouquets. Gotham, standing a little off, looked on indignant as before, and frowned at the flowers and the flushing cheeks drooped over them, as if he had been Mr. Falkirk himself. But when Hazel caught up the basket and ran off to her little corner room, then Gotham did betake himself to the library, though without quite the report suggested.

'Beg pardon, sir,' he said; 'Miss' Azel 'ave just received a bushel of flowers, sir,—if you choose to be h'aware, sir.'

'A *what*, Gotham?' said the astonished Mr. Falkirk.

'No person of discretion to detain them at the 'ouse, sir, and so of course they followed Miss' Azel down 'ere, sir. Boukets enough to last a h'ordinary person all summer, sir. And cards. And ribbands,'—concluded Gotham, beginning to clear the table for tea.

'Look here, Gotham'— said Mr. Falkirk, from his sofa, whence his eyes followed his serving-man about.

'Yes, sir!' said Gotham, erect and motionless.

'Do you dare to speak of Miss Hazel as an ordinary person?'

'Why, no sir! By no means! Very h'extraordinary, I thought I said, sir—or h'indicated,' replied Gotham, going back to his leisurely motions about the table.

'Have the goodness to remember that it is proper her flowers should be extraordinary."

'O, you are clearing the table,' Hazel said, flitting in; 'just what I wanted—tea early.'

'Tea never h'is late, Miss 'Azel!' said Gotham in an aggrieved voice.

'I didn't know but it might be to-night,' said the girl provokingly. 'But dear Mr. Falkirk, do you really like to have your books disturbed so often, just for me?'

'My dear,' said Mr. Falkirk rather lazily, brushing one hand over his forehead, 'you have done that for my life generally.'

'My dear Mr. Falkirk!—evidently I have just come in time to receive a shot meant for somebody else. I wonder you allow yourself to fire at random, sir, in that way.'

'Who has been sending you flowers, Miss Hazel?' her guardian asked, without change of tone.

She laughed.

'Shall I leave you the cards, sir—just to pass away the time while I am gone?'

'I'll take them now, Miss Hazel, if you please.' Mr. Falkirk stretched out his hand.

'They are not so precious as to be carried in my pocket, sir. Do you want them before tea?'

'If you please, Miss Hazel!'

'I don't please a bit, sir. I am in a great hurry to go

to my dressing. And you know, Mr. Falkirk, you seldom try for "the soul of wit" on such occasions.'

'Does that mean, you refuse me the sight of them?

'No, sir!—"By no means!"—to quote Gotham,' said Wych Hazel, jumping up. She came back and laid the cards in his hand—quite a packet of them. Mr. Falkirk found names that he knew and names that he did not. He turned them over, speaking some of the names in an inexpressive sotto voce; and then began doubling them up, one after the other, and letting them fall on the floor beside him.

'Have you got a copy of the Arabian Nights in your library, my dear?' he asked. 'I wish you would send for it. I am not posted. I have an indistinct impression of a fight between two rival powers, in which, after a variety of transformations, the one of them in the shape of a kernel of corn was swallowed by the other in some appropriate shape. I should like to study the tactics, watch my opportunity, and make an end of these gentry.' Mr. Falkirk dropped the last card as he spoke.

'Ha! ha!' laughed Wych Hazel in her soft notes. 'You will feel better, sir, when you have had a cup of tea.' And she began preparing it at once. Whether or not Mr. Falkirk felt better he did not say.

The girl went off to her dressing. And just before the hour when Miss Bird must arrive she came silently in again and stood before her guardian. If Mr. Falkirk thought of humming-birds then, it could only have been of the tropical species. A dark dress, that shimmered and glittered and fell into shadows with every motion, first caught his eye; but then Mr. Falkirk saw that it was looped with bouquets. Now either Miss Hazel's admirers had differing tastes, or a different image

of her, or else each sent what he could get; for the bouquets were extremely diverse. A bunch of heath and myrtle held up the dress here, a cluster of crimson roses held it back there; another cluster of gold and buff, a trailing handful of glowing fuchsias—there is no need to go through the list. But she had arranged them with great skill to set each other off; tied together by their own ribbands, catching up the shimmer of her dress.

Mr. Falkirk looked, and the fact that his face expressed nothing at all was rather significant. One glance at the girl's face he gave, and turned away.

'Take care, my dear,' he said.

'Of what, sir?'

'How do *you* know but those flowers are bewitched: You would not be the first woman who had put on her own chains.'

She smiled—rather to herself than him—throwing her little white cloak over her shoulders; and then, girl-like, went down on one knee and kissed her guardian's hand.

'Good night, sir,' she said. The carriage came, and she was gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

MOONSHINE.

AFTER the day of rain, and the afternoon of clearing wind and clouds, the evening of Mrs. Merrick's party passed into one of those strange, unearthly nights when the whole world seems resolved into moonlight and a midsummer night's dream. So while gas and hot-house flowers had it all their own way in the house at Merricksdale, over the rest of the outside world the wondrous moonlight reigned supreme Not white and silvery, but as it were gilded and mellowed with the summer warmth. Step by step it invaded the opening ranks of forest trees; and dark shadows wound noiselessly away from the close pursuit. Not a wind whispered; not a moving thing was in sight along the open road. Except indeed Mr. Rollo, who—not invited to Mrs. Merrick's, and just returned from a short journey—was getting over the ground that lay between the railway station and home on foot. And his way took him along the highway that stretched from Crocus to the gates of Chickaree.

Now moonlight is a very bewildering thing—and thoughts do sometimes play the very will-o'-the-wisp with one. And when somebody you know is at a party,

there is a funny inclination to go through the motions at least, and be up as late as anybody else. So it was with a somewhat sudden recollection that Mr. Rollo bethought him of what his watch might say. Just then he was in a belt of shadow, where trees crowded out the moon ; but the next sharp turn of the road was all open and flooded with the yellow light.

It would be quite too much to suppose that the gentleman in question was particularly open to impressions—and it is certain that his thoughts at that minute were well wrapped up in their own affairs ; and yet as he went round the turn, passing out of the line of shadow into absolute moonshine again, there came upon him a strange sense of some presence there besides his own. But what the evidence was, whether it had smote upon his eye or upon his ear, of that Mr. Rollo was profoundly ignorant. Yet it is safe to say that he came out of his musings and looked about him. Only a midsummer night's dream still : the open road for a mile ahead in full view, the dark line of trees on each side as motionless as if asleep. But the utter hush was perhaps more suggestive than the stir of a breezy night : it seemed as if everything was listening and held its breath to hear.

The gentleman in question, however, was not one to let slip such a suggestion to his nerves—or his senses. His nerves were of the coolest and steadiest kind ; he could depend on *them* for getting up no shams to puzzle him ; and his senses had had capital training. Eye and ear were keen almost as those of some of the wild creatures whose dependence they are ; and Rollo had the craft and skill of a practised hunter. So instead of dismissing the fancy that had struck him, as most

men would, he fell noiselessly into the shadow again, with eyes and ears alive on the instant to take evidence that might be relied on. But nothing stirred. Nothing shewed. Except as before, the yellow moonlight and the dark trees. Rollo was a hunter, and patient. He stood still. The shadowy edges of the stream of light changed slowly, slightly, and still the evidence he looked for did not come. Nothing seemed to change but those dark fringes; only now some wave of the branches as the wind began to rise, let in the moonlight for a moment upon a small white speck across the road. He thought so: something whiter than a wet stone or a bleached stick,—or it might be fancy. Noiselessly and almost invisibly, for Dane could move like an Indian, and with such quickness, he was over the road and at the spot. There was no mistaking the token—it was a little glove of Wych Hazel's. Evidently dropped in haste; for one of her well-known jewelled fastenings lay glittering in his hand. But—Mrs. Gen. Merrick lived quite in another quarter of the world; and in no case did the direct road from Merricksdale lead by here.

If Rollo's senses had been alive before, which was but their ordinary and normal condition, he was now in the frame of mind of a Sioux on the war-path, and in corresponding alertness and acuteness of every faculty. The little glove was swiftly put where it would furnish a spot of light to no one else; and in breathless readiness for action, though that is rhetorical, for Rollo's breath was as regular and as calm as cool nerves could make it, he subsided again into the utter inaction which is all eye and ear. And then in a few minutes, from across the road again, and near where he was at first, came these soft words:

'Mr. Rollo—will you give quarter if I surrender at discretion? Just to save you trouble—and let me get home the quicker.'

In the next instant the gentleman stood by the lady's side. Well for him that he was a hunter, and that habit is a great thing; for he made no exclamations and showed no disturbance, though Wych Hazel in the woods at that time of night, was a thing to try most people's command of words at least. Only in the spring which brought him across the road he had spoken the one word "Hazel!" louder than an Indian would have done. Then he stood beside her. Wych Hazel herself—bareheaded, without gloves, her little white evening cloak not around her shoulders, but rolled up into the smallest possible compass, and held down by her side. She had been standing in the deepest depth of shadow under a low drooping hemlock, and now came out to meet him. But she seemed to have no more words to give. That something had happened, was very clear. Rollo's first move was to take the girl's hand, and the second to inquire in a low voice how she came there. The hand-touch was not in compliment, but such a taking-possession clasp as Hazel had felt from it before; one that carried, as a hand-clasp can, its guaranty of protection, guidance, defence.

Hazel did not answer at first—only there went a shiver over her from head to foot; and her hand was as cold as ice.

'I am very glad to find you, Mr. Rollo,' she said in a sort of measured voice; he could not tell what was in it.—'Will you walk home with me?'

Rollo's answer was not in a hurry. He first took

from Wych Hazel her little bundle of the opera cloak, shook it out, and put it around her shoulders, drawing the fastening button at the throat; then taking the little cold hand in his clasp again, and with the other arm lingering lightly round her shoulders, he asked her "what had happened?"

People are different, as has been remarked. There was nobody in the world that could have put the question to Wych Hazel as he put it, and afterwards she could recognize that. Mr. Falkirk's words would have been more anxious; Dr. Maryland's would have been more astonished; and any one of Miss Hazel's admirers would have made speeches of surprise and sympathy and offered service. Rollo's was a business question, albeit in its somewhat curt accentuation there lurked a certain readiness for action; and there was besides, though indefinably expressed, the assumption of a right to know and a very intimate personal concern in the answer. How his eyes were looking at her the moonlight did not serve to shew; they were in shadow; yet even that was not quite hid from the object of them; and the arm that was round her was there, not in freedom-taking, but with the unmistakeable expression of shelter. So he stood and asked her what had happened.

'Thank you,' she said in the same measured tone. 'I am not cold—I think. But it is safe now. Will you walk home very fast, please? I promised Mr. Falkirk that I would be home by eleven!'—There was an accent of real distress then.

'Do you know what o'clock it is now?' said Rollo, drawing out his watch.

'I hoped—a while ago—it was near morning.'

He did not say what time it was. He put the little hand on his arm, guided Hazel into the road, and began his walk homeward, but with a measured quiet pace, not 'very fast.'

'Why did you wish it was morning?' he asked in the same way in which he had spoken before. No haste in it; calm business and self-possession; along with the other indications above mentioned. It was cool, but it was the coolness of a man intensely alive to the work in hand; the intonation towards Wych Hazel very gentle.

'I thought I had to walk home alone,' she said simply. 'And I wanted the time to come.'

'Please tell me the meaning of all this. You went to Merricksdale this evening—last evening?'

'Yes.' Words did not come readily.

Rollo added no more questions then. He went steadily on, keeping a gentle pace that Wych Hazel could easily bear, until they came to the long grey stone house where she had once run in from the storm. At the gate Rollo paused and opened it, leading his companion up to the door.

'I am going to take you in here for a little while,' he said. 'We will disturb nobody—don't fear; I have a key.'

'In here?' she said, rousing up then. 'O no!—I *must* go home, Mr. Rollo. Did you bring me *this* way—I did not notice.'

'You shall go home just as soon as possible,' he said; 'but come in here and I will tell you my reasons for stopping.'

The door opened noiselessly. The moonlight showed the way, shining in through the fanlights, and Rollo pushed open the door of the library and brought his

charge in there. The next thing was to strike a match and light two candles. The room looked very peaceful, just as it had been deserted by the family a few hours before; Rosy's work basket with the work overflowing it, the books and papers on the table where the gentleman had been sitting; the chairs standing where they had been last used. Past the chairs Rollo brought Wych Hazel to the chintz sofa and seated her there with a cushion at her back; drew up a foot cushion, and unfastened her opera cloak. All this was done with quiet movements and in silence. He left her then for a few minutes. Coming back, presented her on a little tray a glass of milk and a plate of rusks.

'I could get nothing else,' said he, 'without rousing the people up to give me keys. But I know the way to Prim's dairy—and I know which are the right pans to go to. Miss Prudentia always objected to that in me.'

'But I cannot see anybody—nor speak to anybody—nor do anything—till I have seen Mr. Falkirk,' said Hazel, looking up at him with her tired eyes. 'Indeed I am not hungry.'

He stood before her and bade her 'drink a little milk—it was good.'

Her brows drew together slightly, but—if that was the quickest way she would take that—and so half emptied the tumbler and set it down again.

'Now let us go.'

He sat down before her then.

'Is there anything in what has happened to-night which makes you wish to keep it from the rest of the world? except of course Mr. Falkirk and me?'

If his object was to rouse her from the mechanical way in which she had hitherto moved and spoken,

success is rarely more perfect. Crimson and scarlet and all shades of colour went over her face and neck at the possible implication in his words ; but she drew herself up with a world of girlish dignity, and then the brown eyes looked straight into his.

"'It is nobody's business,' she answered. 'So far.—No further.'

He smiled. 'You mistake me,' he said, very pleasantly. 'That is my awkwardness. It *is* nobody's business—except Mr. Falkirk's and mine. But you know very well that fact is no bar to people's tongues. And sometimes one does not choose to give them the material—and sometimes one does not care. My question meant only, do you care in this instance? and was a practical question.'

'What do *you* mean?' she said, quickly. 'Say out all that is in your mind. How can I judge of it by inches.'

'You have not enlightened me,' he said, 'and *I* can judge of nothing. Do you wish to get home without letting anybody know you have been out? or may I call Primrose down and give you into her hands to be taken care of? Surely you know my other question referred not to anything but the impertinence of the world generally.'

'O! I will go home!' she said, rising up. 'I cannot see anybody. And Mr. Falkirk!—He might send for me!'

'Mr. Falkirk is fast asleep,' said Rollo. 'He will have concluded that you were kept at Mrs. Merrick's. Sit down again, and rest,' he said, gently putting her back on the cushions, (he had risen when she rose)—'we are not ready to go quite yet. You must take breath first. And we must not rouse up Chickaree at this

hour. If you were known to have staid with Miss Maryland—would not that be the best way?'

'How is one to know the best, where all are bad?'—Hazel rested her head in her hands and sat thinking.

'No,' said he quietly—'we'll try and not have that true. If you could trust me with the story of the evening, I might be able to judge and act better for you.'

'Did you bring me here that I might not get home at such an hour?' she said suddenly, looking up.

'I promised to tell you my reasons. Yes, that was one of them. The people at Chickaree must not know of your coming home in the middle of the night, on foot. If I take you home at a fair hour in the morning, it will be all right. Not on foot,' said he, smiling. He was so composed and collected, that his manner had everything in it to soothe and reassure her. Not the composure of one who does not care, but of one who will take care.

'And Mr. Falkirk would say the same,'—she spoke as if reasoning the matter out with herself. 'Then I must wait. But do not call anybody. Mayn't I sit here just quietly by myself?'

'Suppose you take possession of one of Prim's spare rooms, and astonish the family at breakfast? All you need say is that you came after they were all gone to their rooms. Dr. Maryland will never seek for a reason. And Prim will never ask for one. But if you prefer it, I will take you home before they are up.'

'Just as you please,' she answered wearily: indeed weariness was fast getting the upper hand. '*You* must want rest, I should think. What were you doing there?' she asked with her former suddenness. 'Were you looking for me? Did you know where I was—not?'

'No,' he said, smiling again, 'I had been to Troy to look at some horses, about which I had been in correspondence; and wishing to be here to-morrow—that is, to-day!—it pleased me to take a night train which set me down at Henderson; no nearer; I was walking across country to get home. And I feel as if I never should be "tired" again. Come—you can have some time of rest at least; and I will carry you home before or after breakfast, just as you please.'

Upstairs with noiseless footfalls—and Rollo reminding Wych Hazel which was Primrose's room, indicated another close by, within which he said he believed she would find what she wanted. That room was always kept in order for strangers; and no strangers were in the house now.

'Primrose will come to you in the morning,' he said, unless you wish to go before that?'

'Wych Hazel turned and held out her hand.

'Thank you!' she said. Then in answer to his last words—'I shall be ready for either.'

Wherein, however, Miss Kennedy made a mistake. For having once put herself down on the fresh white bed, sleep took undisputed possession and held it straight on. Neither rousing bell nor breakfast bell roused her; nor opening door—if any opened; nor steps—if any came. Sleep so profound that she never turned nor stirred nor raised her cheek from the hand where first she laid it down. And the sun was getting a new view of the western slopes of the Chickaree woods, before the young mistress thereof sat up in her strange room and looked about her.

'Well, you are awake at last!' cried Prim, bending to kiss her. 'I *am* glad! though I was glad to have you sleep, too. How tired you were!'

Wych Hazel passed her hands over her face ; but the next move was to put her arms round Prim's neck and for a moment her head on Prim's shoulder. Then she sprang up and hurriedly shook her dress into some sort of order.

'O ! I have slept a great deal too long,' she said.

'Why ? No, you have slept just enough. Now you would like to change your dress. There is a valise full of things from home for you. And when you are ready you shall have some breakfast, or dinner, or tea, just which you like to call it.'

Primrose could not read the look and flush that greeted the valise ; and indeed she needed an entire new dictionary for her friend this day. When Hazel made her appearance down stairs, hat in hand, she had more things in her face than Prim had ever met, even in dreams. Dr. Maryland was not there ; the table was spread in the library, where the afternoon light poured in through its green veil of branches and leaves ; and Prim gave her guest a new greeting, as glad as if she had given her none before.

'I'm sure of having you hungry, now, Hazel,' she exclaimed. 'I didn't know what was best to give you ; but Duke said coffee would be sure to be right.'

'I wonder if you ever suggest anything which he does not think is "sure to be right ?" said Wych Hazel. 'I wonder if anybody down here ever makes a mistake of any sort ?'

'Mistakes ? oh ! plenty,' said Primrose. 'I do ; and I suppose Duke does. I don't know about papa. Now, dear Hazel, sit down. Duke will be here directly.'

And Primrose cut bread and poured out coffee and supplied her guest, in a sort of passion of hospitality.

To say that the guest was as hungry as she should have been after such a fast, would be perhaps too much; last night was still too fresh for that; but seventeen has great restorative powers at command, and Prim's coffee was undeniably good. Hazel grew more like herself as the meal went on, though her eyes kept their tired look, and her manner was a trifle abstracted. But Prim asked no questions; only hovered about her with all sorts of affectionate words and ways, till Rollo came in. He sat down and began to make himself generally useful, in his wonted manner.

'Duke,' said Primrose, 'Miss Kennedy has been asking me if we ever make mistakes in this house!'

'What did you tell her?'

'Why you know what I told her. I am not sure about papa; but the rest of us don't boast of infallible wisdom.'

'Do you mean that he does?' said Duke, drily. At which Primrose laughed. 'Have you been asleep, Miss Hazel?'

'Beyond reach of all earthly things. Have you?'

Rollo remarked that he never got so far as that.

'No,' said Primrose, 'I never saw such a sleeper. He'll be sound asleep, sound and fast; not dreaming nor stirring; and if there comes the least little sound that there *oughtn't* to be, he's up and broad awake and in possession of all his senses in a minute.'

'How do you know?' said the subject of this description.

'I know,' said Primrose. 'Thunder wouldn't waken him; and the turning of a key in a lock would—suppose it was a time or place when the lock ought not to be turned.'

'Very interesting details!' said Rollo. 'They may be useful in the study of psychology—or physiology. Which is your favourite study, Miss Hazel?'

'Whichever will throw the most light upon this: Prim, can he also detect "the least little sound that oughtn't to be," when there is none at all?' said Hazel thinking of last night.

'No, he can't,' said Rollo, shaking his head. 'That's a physiological question. But here is one in psychology: Can a person be sensible of an unknown *presence* when yet there is none?'

'Ah!' she said, drawing a long breath and growing grave all at once, 'I wish one might! It would have been a comfort.'

'Well,' said he, 'I think I can resolve that question.'

'Duke, what are you talking of? You have got out of philosophy into metaphysics,' said Prim.

'*She* is the philosopher of the family,' said Rollo, by way of explanation to Hazel. 'But she has made a mistake. As she confesses she does make them, I may remark that.'

'Why, you are talking of perceiving what does not exist!' cried Prim.

'Is that what you call metaphysics? I should call it nonsense.'

'I never supposed you were talking nonsense, Duke.

'No,' said Duke. "That *would* be a mistake. No, I was speaking, Prim, of the detection, by no visible or intelligible means, of what we are not aware has existence.'

'By no intelligible means,' said Prim. 'You mean, knowing a person is coming, that you have not heard is coming—and such things?'

'And knowing a person is near, who you had thought was very far off.'

'Yes,' said Prim thoughtfully; 'I know. It is very curious.'

'Witches, for instance?' said Hazel, with perfect gravity.

'No,' said Prim earnestly, 'I don't mean out-of-the-way people at all; though *it* is something "uncanny" —as it seems;—queer; I have heard of instances.'

'I have felt them,' said Rollo.

Primrose went into a brown study over the question.

'But do you think,' Rollo went on gravely addressing Wych Hazel, 'that this sort of mental action can take place except where there are strong sympathetic—or other—relations between the parties?'

'So that the magnet finds out the iron, when it would pass by the lead?—is that what you mean?'

A significant, quick, keen look; and then Rollo said, very gravely,

'But it strikes me we have got the thing reversed. Is it not rather the iron that finds the magnet?'

'The magnet must be conscious too,' said Hazel. 'And I think it moves—where the iron is in sufficient quantity.'

'It would be a poor rule that wouldn't work both ways,' said Rollo, with dry simplicity.

'What are you talking about?' said Primrose. 'Do give Hazel some more raspberries. I am inclined to think this, Duke—'

'Well?'

'I am inclined to think that in those cases you have been speaking of, there *is* testimony of the person's presence, only it is in some such little slight things as were

insufficient to draw attention to themselves, and only, by natural association of ideas, suggested the person.'

'What do you think, Miss Hazel?'

But she shook her head.

'If you go off to people—I should say, sometimes, that could not be.'

'So should I,' said Rollo.

'Why?' said Primrose.

'I cannot find in my consciousness, or memory, any corroboration of your theory.'

'I think I can in mine. Sometimes, at least.'

'Those are not my times,' said Rollo.

'And I don't know but you are right, too,' said Primrose, musing. 'I remember, that day you were coming home, I had not the least reason to think so, and yet you were in my mind all day.'

'What is your explanation then?' said he, smiling at her.

Prim was not ready with it; and before she was ready to speak again, Wych Hazel was informed that her escort was at her service.

Dr. Maryland's little old chaise was at the door. Rollo put Miss Kennedy in it and took the reins. It was late in the sweet Summer afternoon; the door and the road and the fields looked exceedingly unlike the same things seen in shadow and moonlight last night. Rollo never referred to that, however; he was just as usual; took care that Wych Hazel was comfortably seated, and made careless little remarks, in his wonted manner. Various people passed them; many were the greetings, answered for the most part very sedately by the young lady of Chickaree. But just as they entered the outskirts of her own domain, Rollo felt his companion

shrink towards him with a sudden start. Then instantly she sat upright in her place. Two or three horsemen were in sight, at different distances; one, the nearest, was a stranger to Rollo. A remarkably handsome man, splendidly mounted, faultlessly dressed; riding his grey with the easy grace of a true cavalier. He uncovered before he was near enough to do more, and then bent even to his saddle-bow before Miss Kennedy. And to him, turning full upon him, did Miss Kennedy administer the most complete, cool, effectual cut that Mr. Rollo had ever seen bestowed. The rider's face turned crimson as he passed on.

Rollo made no sort of remark; drove gently, let the old horse come to a walk; and at last, throwing himself back into the corner of the chaise, so as to have a better look at his companion, he said:

'Does daylight and rest make a difference, and are you inclined to trust me with the explanation of what happened last night? I should be grateful.'

He could see now with what extreme effort she had done her work of execution—lip and chin were in a tremor.

'It was no want of trust, Mr. Rollo—I meant you should know. But—I could not tell you first,' she said rather timidly. 'I thought, perhaps, you would take the trouble to come in and hear me tell Mr. Falkirk.'

'Thank you,' he said, 'I *am* grateful.' And no more passed on the subject until the chaise reached the cottage.

CHAPTER XXII.

A REPORT.

JUST glancing round at her companion to make sure that he followed, taking off her hat as she went, Hazel passed swiftly into the cottage and into Mr. Falkirk's study, to the foot of his couch—and there stood still. Very unlike the figure of last evening,—in the simplest pale Summer dress, with no adornment but her brown hair, and yet as Mr. Falkirk looked, he thought he had never seen her look so lovely. She was surely changing fast; the old girlish graces were taking to themselves the richer and stronger graces of womanhood; and like those evening flowers that open and unfold and gather sweetness if you but turn aside for a moment, so she seemed to have altered, even since her guardian's last look. The broad gipsy hanging from her hand, her long eyelashes drooped,—so she stood. Mr. Falkirk looked and took the effect of all this in a glance two seconds long, during which, something held his tongue. Then as his eye caught the figure that entered following her, it darted towards him a look of sudden surprise and suspicion. That changed, however, almost as soon, and his eyes came back to his ward. But there is no doubt Mr. Falkirk scowled.

'So, Miss Hazel,' he began, in his usual manner, 'you found you could not manage other people's carriages last night?'

'Not the right ones, sir. Will you ask Mr. Rollo to sit down, Mr. Falkirk? It is due to me that he should hear all I have to say.'

'It is not due to anybody that you should say it standing,' said Rollo, wheeling up into convenient position the easiest chair that the room contained. She made him a slight sign of acknowledgment, but yielded only so far as to lay her hand on the chair back. Probably it was pleasant to touch something. Rollo stepped back to the mantlepiece and stood there, but not touching it or anything.

'It appears to me, Miss Hazel,' said the recumbent master of the house, that the invitation must come from you.'

'I have not been invited myself, sir, yet.'

'I do not recollect inviting you to be seated yesterday, my dear; is to-day different from yesterday?'

'Unless I have forgotten the frown which welcomed me then, sir. I suppose you have but a faint idea of the looming up of your brows just now.'

'What?' said Mr. Falkirk. 'Don't you know, Miss Hazel, a man's brows are not within his range of vision? and I deny that he is responsible for them. Am I frowning now?'

'Not quite so portentously, sir.'

'Then you need not stand so particularly, need you? I wonder, if I looked so fierce, how Rollo dared to offer you the civility of a chair in my presence; but people are different.'

'But I cannot sit there,' she said, with a glance towards the bringer of the chair, as she passed by its reposeful depths. 'Not now. If Mr. Rollo will make himself comfortable in his own way, I will in mine.' And

Hazel brought a foot cushion to the couch and sat down there; a little turned away from the third member of the party; who however did not change his position.

'Is there business?' said Mr. Falkirk glancing from one to the other.

The girl gave him a swift glance of wonder.

'You used to think it was business, sir, to know what had become of me. Did you sleep well last night, Mr. Falkirk?'

'Why should I, any more than you?' said Mr. Falkirk in his old fashion of growling. 'Day is the proper time for sleeping, in the fashionable world.'

It made her restless—this keeping off the subject of which her thoughts were full. Didn't he mean to ask any questions?

'Why should not I have slept, sir?—if you come to that. The fashionable world was not to hold me beyond eleven.'

'So I understood, and endeavoured to stipulate,' said Mr. Falkirk, 'but I am told you were so late in returning that you would not come home, and preferred, somewhat inexplicably, disturbing Mrs. Maryland to disturbing me.'

'Is that what you think?' she answered, simply. 'That I broke my word? Mr. Falkirk, I began returning as you say, at a quarter past eleven.'

'I never expected you to get off before that, my dear. Then what was the matter?'

The girl hesitated a moment, and then one of her witch looks flashed through in spite of everything.

'I fell into Charybdis, sir, that was all.'

'I do not remember any such place between here and Merricksdale,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'Was it enchantment,

my dear?' But his face was less careless than his words. Hers grew grave again at once; and, wasting no more time, Miss Kennedy addressed herself to business.

'I had arranged it all with Miss Bird,' she said, 'on the way there. She had a headache and was glad of an excuse to get away early. It was "a small party," I found, when you were in the house and the rest were out of doors, but otherwise everybody was there—and nearly everybody else. The trees were all lights and flowers; and supper tables stood ready from the first; and you know what the moon was. So altogether,' said Miss Hazel, 'it was hard to remember anything about time, and especially to find out. I fancied that Mrs. Merrick had told about my going early,—watches seemed so very uncertain, and so many of them had stopped at nine o'clock. It was only by a chance overhearing that I knew when it was half-past ten. I lost just a few minutes then, manœuvring,—for I did not want "everybody" to see me to the carriage; but when I had vanished into the house, and found Mrs. Merrick, Miss Bird was not there. She had gone home an hour before, her head being worse, they said.'

Mr. Falkirk said nothing, but his thick brows grew together again.

'Mrs. Merrick said it was not the least matter; her coachman unfortunately was sick, but fifty people would be only too happy. I said everybody but me wished to stay late,—O, no, not at all!—here was Mr. May, going in five minutes, with his sister. They would be "delighted." I could not well tell her, sir,' said Wych Hazel, with a look at her guardian, 'all that occurred to me in the connection, but I suppose I negatived Mr. May in

my face, for Mrs. Merrick went on. 'Mr. Morton, then,—the most luxurious coach in the county." He too was going at once—if I did. Or, if I did not mind the walk, her brother-in-law would take charge of me at any moment with pleasure.'

Certainly Mr. Falkirk outdid himself in scowling, at this point.

'Well—I must get home somehow,' she said with another glance,—'and the coach would never do, and the phaeton was tabooed. But I knew Mrs. Merrick's sister was Mrs. Blake; and so, thinking of the old doctor, I said at once that I would walk, and ran upstairs for my cloak. And then I found out,' said Wych Hazel slowly, 'that there are two sorts of brothers-in-law.'

Nobody interrupted her, nor spoke when she paused. The little room was very still, except from the movements the girl made herself.

'This was the wrong one. Not old doctor Blake at all, but a younger brother of Gen. Merrick. What could I do?' she said, with a half appealing look that went for a second further than her guardian. 'Already my promise was in peril; and there was Mr. Morton beseeching me into his coach—and I could not get up a fuss.' It was very pretty and characteristic, the unconscious way in which she brought in—and left out—the third one in the room. Sometimes forgetting everybody but her guardian, and giving him details that were plainly meant for his ears alone; then, with a sudden blush and stop, remembering that there was another listener standing by. On such occasions she would generally turn her face a little more away and out of sight, and then begin again, in a tone that meant to keep clear of all further special confidences in that direction. The

third member of the party stood perfectly still and made no remark whatever.

'Well?' said Mr. Falkirk, with rather a short breath, as the girl paused.

'There was nothing left for me but the walk—unless a fuss, and a half dozen more standing round. Then Mr. Morton said he should walk, too, at least as far as the cross-road, and let the carriage follow at a foot pace in case I should turn weary. If he had been half as anxious about my weariness as he professed,' said the girl, with a curl of her lips, 'he would have tried how fast his horses could go for once, with him behind them. But I could not tell him that any plainer than I did.'

'You tried to make him drive on and leave you?' said Mr. Falkirk.

'I tried to make him let me alone, sir,' said the girl flushing. 'As to the way, I think I made no suggestions. So we walked on, and Mr. Morton made himself exceedingly—disagreeable,'

'Too officious? Or too presumptuous? He's an ass!' said Mr. Falkirk, who was plainly getting restive. 'Which, Hazel?'

'Unbearable I called it, sir, I was in no mood for nice definitions. And I couldn't have been tired *then* if we had walked through the moonlight straight on to the moon! But—I had been lectured so much about self-control' (an invisible glance went here) 'that, somehow, he seemed to keep his patience the better, the more I lost mine. I never remember your telling me, sir, that my wilful moods were particularly becoming, but I began to think it must be so; and actually thought of trying a little complaisance.' Whereat, Miss Hazel brought herself to a sudden stop.

'My dear!' said Mr. Falkirk. 'What was the other man about.'

'He was walking on the other side,' said Hazel, her voice changing. 'But he left me to Mr. Morton, in effect, and scarcely said three words all this time. I trusted his thoughts were too busy with Miss Powder, to notice what went on near by.'

'This is what comes of what you erroneously term dancing on the branches of trees!' said Mr. Falkirk, in a great state of disgust. 'But I have no idea I should have gone to that woman's if I had been free. More comes of it than I reckoned upon, or than six weeks will see me through. Well, you got rid of him at last, I suppose; and walked all the way to Dr. Maryland's in your slippers!

'My dear Mr. Falkirk!—slippers at an out-door party! Yes, I "got rid of him," as you say, when we reached the turning to Morton Hollow,' Hazel went on, rather slowly, the shadow coming into her tone again. 'And then, after that, I found out why my other companion had been so silent.'

'Found out! He had not been taking too much?'

'I told you the supper tables stood ready all the evening,' said the girl, sinking her voice; 'and—it was plain—now—what he had found there.'

The silence now, rather than any words, bade her go on. She caught her breath a little, mastering her excitement.

'I knew, presently, what I must do. And when. You have told me, sir, sometimes, that I was too hasty to resolve and to do,—I had to be both now.'

'What did you do?' said her guardian.

'I must get away. And on the instant. For, just be-

yond, the woods ceased, and there was a long stretch of open road. I thought, in that second, that my cloak might be caught. So, with my free hand, I unfastened it—I don't know how I ever did it!' said the girl, excitedly, 'unless, as Byo says, mamma's prayers were round me!—but I slipped the cloak from my shoulders and tore away my other hand, and sprang into the woods.'

They could almost hear her heart beat, as she sat there.

'Into the woods alone!' cried Mr. Falkirk. 'Then —Go on, my dear,' he said, his voice falling into great gentleness.

'Things came so fast upon me then!' she said with a shiver. 'I had said, in that moment, "I can but try,"—and now I felt that if you try—some things—you *must* succeed. To fail, then, would be just a game of hide-and-seek. That was the first thought. I must keep ahead, if it killed me. And then—instantly—I knew that to do that I must not run!'—

'What *did* you do?' said Mr. Falkirk.

'I might not be the fastest; and, if I ran, I should maybe not know just where—he—was,—nor when the pursuit was given up. I must pass from shadow to shadow; moving only when he moved; keeping close watch; until he got tired and went back.'

Hazel leaned her head on her hands, as if the mere recollection were all she could bear.

'My dear!'—exclaimed Mr. Falkirk. 'Did you keep up this game *long?*'

'I do not know, sir,' she said, wearily; 'it seemed—' she stopped short,—then went on:

'I knew my dress was dark enough to pass notice;

and as softly as I could I rolled up my white cloak and took off my gloves, lest any chance light might fall on them. My steps were steady—the others not: so far I had the advantage. Several times I heard my name—I think the surprise must have sobered him a little, for he called to me that that was not the road. But how long it went on, I cannot tell.'

'Till he gave it up?'

'Yes. At last, I saw him go back to the road, and heard his tread there, turning back the way we had come. Past me. And again I had to wait. Only I crept to the edge of the trees, where I could see far down the moonlight, and watch the one moving shadow there, that it did not turn off again among the shadows where I stood. And then I began to think I could not go on towards home along that open stretch before me,—for at least a mile there were only fields and fences on either hand. I had noticed it when we drove along in the evening. I could not go back towards Mrs. Merrick's. Then I remembered, in my ride upon Vixen, finding a short cut from this road to one from Dr. Maryland's. And I thought if I could once get to that, I should find unbroken woodland, where I could pass along unseen. For that, however, I must cross the road—in the full, clear light. And what that was!—

'But I went safe,' she began again, 'and reached the shadows on the other side before there came sounds upon the road once more, and the full stream of late people began to come rattling down from Merricksdale.'

'Yes!'—Mr. Falkirk's word was rather breathless.

'At first, when I saw the first carriage, I thought I would speak and claim protection. But that held only men. And then came others on foot—and some that I

knew. And it seemed to me, that instead of speaking I almost shrank into a shadow myself. And when there came a little interval, so that I dared move, I sprang away again, and went through the woods as fast as I could go, and go softly. The belt is not broad there, I suppose,' she said after another pause; 'and I reached the other road and went on a while in the darkness, along the edge. But I think by this time I must have been tired, I grew so suddenly trembling and unsteady. And the night was so still, and yet I seemed to hear steps everywhere. I could not bear it any longer; and I thought I would just be quiet and wait for the day. Only—so far my wits served me yet—I must once more cross the road; for the moon was sinking westward now, and the level rays came in about my feet.'

'I thought I could not do it at first,' she said, with a voice that told more than the words,—'go out into that stream of light; but then I did; and hid myself in the branches of a great hemlock, and waited there.

'And then I found Mr. Rollo,—and I knew that I might trust him.'

With which most unconscious full-sized compliment, the girl crossed her arms upon her lap, and laid her face down upon them, and was still.

'How did she find you?' demanded Mr. Falkirk with unceremonious energy. The answer was in an undertone:

'I found her.'

Mr. Falkirk was silent again.

'No,' said Wych Hazel, without raising her head, and again not stopping to measure her words. 'You would have stood there till this time, if I had not spoken!'

'Would I?' said Rollo.

'And how came you to be there at all at that time of night?' said Mr. Falkirk.

'On my way from the cars.'

'Cars, where?'

'Henderson.'

'Walk from Henderson!' said Mr. Falkirk.

'Save time. I wanted to be here to-day.' The answers were all short and grave, as a man speaks who has no words that he wants to say.

'And Mr. Rollo thought,' said Hazel, looking up, 'that it was better for me to come home from Dr. Maryland's than from the woods. And—when he spoke of it—I supposed you would say that too, Mr. Falkirk.'

But Mr. Falkirk vouchsafed no corroboration of this opinion.

'Did I do well, sir?' she said a little eagerly, but meaning now the whole night's work. 'Did I do ill? Was I a bit like your old ideal—"a woman" and "brave"? Or was I only a girl, and very foolish?' They were so silent, these men!—it tried her. Did they, in their worldly wisdom, see any better way out of her hard places, than her seventeen years' inexperience had found, at such a cost? The brown eyes looked searchingly at Mr. Falkirk, and again for an instant went beyond him to Mr. Rollo.

'Answer, Mr. Falkirk!' said the younger man.

'My dear,' said Wych Hazel's guardian, 'if I had been a quarter as much a man as you have proved yourself a woman, your bravery never would have been so tried.'

'And the bravery was as much as the womanliness!' said the other, in the short, terse way of all his words this afternoon; no air of compliment whatever hanging about the words.

She answered with only a deep flush of pleasure, and eyes that went down now, and a smile just playing round the corners of her mouth—the first that had been there that afternoon. It may be remarked that there was no pleasure in either of the other faces.

'Who knows about this?' said Mr. Falkirk, suddenly.

'Nobody,' said Rollo.

'Not Miss Maryland?'

'I could answer for her; but she knows nothing.'

Wych Hazel looked up, listening. It was interesting to hear somebody else talk now. Talk was stayed, however. Both men were thinking; their thoughts did not run easily into spoken words. Or not while she was present; for after a sudden excursion up stairs to see what notes and messages might need attention, on returning she found the two deep in talk; Rollo seated near the head of Mr. Falkirk's couch, and bending towards him. He sprang up as Wych Hazel came in and took leave; shaking Mr. Falkirk's hand cordially and then clasping Wych Hazel's. For the first time then a gleam of his usual gay humour broke on his lips and in his eye, as he said softly:

'I should have made you speak before that!'

CHAPTER XXIII.

KITTY FISHER.

NOTHING but the most superb propriety was to be expected at Mrs. Powder's; nevertheless Wych Hazel went escorted by Prim and Rollo in Dr. Maryland's rockaway. Dr. Maryland himself had been persuaded to the dinner, and it was on his arm Miss Kennedy made her entrance upon the company. Something unlike anything the doctor had ever taken charge of before,—in a dress of tea-rose colour this time, and with only tea-roses for trimming.

It was not a large company assembled for dinner, though everybody was expected in the evening. This was a different affair from Merricksdale; an old proud family name in the mistress of the mansion; old fashioned respectability and modern fashion commingled in the house and entertainment; the dinner party very strictly chosen. Beyond that fact, it was not perhaps remarkable. After dinner Dr. Maryland went home; and gayer and younger began to pour in. Following close upon Mrs. Merrick's entertainment, this evening too had the adornment of the full moon; and as this party also was an out-door one, as much as people chose to have it so, the adornment was material. A large pleasure ground around the house, half garden, half shrubbery, was open to promenaders; and at certain points there were lights and seats and music and refreshments; the last two not

necessarily together. On this pleasure ground opened the windows of the drawing room and to this led the steps of the piazza; and so it came to pass in the course of the evening that the house was pretty well deserted of all but the elderly part of the guests.

In this state of things, said elderly portion of the company might as well be at home for all the care they are able to bestow on the younger. Wandering in shadow and light, in and out through the winding walks, blending in groups and scattered in couples, the young friends of Mrs. Powder did pretty much as they pleased. But one thing Wych Hazel had cause to suspect as the evening wore on, that though her guardian proper was fast-at-home, she had an active actual guardian much nearer to her, and in fact never very far off for long at a time. Indeed he paraded no attentions, either before Wych Hazel's eyes or the eyes of the public; but if she wanted anything, Rollo found it out; if she needed anything, he was at hand to give it. His care did not burden her, nor make itself at all conspicuous to other people; nevertheless she surely could not but be conscious of it. This by the way.

Dr. Maryland had not been gone long; the new arrivals were just pouring in; when a seat beside Wych Hazel was taken by Mr. Nightingale.

'You were at Merricksdale the other night?' He said after the first compliments.

'Yes, for a while.'

'I knew you would be. I was in despair that I could not get there;—but engagements—contretemps—held us fast. I see now how much I lost.'

'Then you are released from imaginary evils,—that must be a comfort.'

'Do you know,' said Stuart, 'I think the toilet is a fine art?'

She did not answer, looking at two or three somewhat remarkable specimens of the art that just then swept by.

'Who is Miss Fisher, Mr. Nightingale?' she asked suddenly.

'O don't you know Kitty? To be sure, she has just come.'

'No, I do not know her. May I know who she is?'

'Not to know her, argues—Well, it isn't so extreme a case as that. Miss Fisher, for character, is the most amiable of persons; for accomplishments, she can do everything; for connections, (do you always want to know people's connections?) she is a niece, I believe, of Dr. Maryland's.'

'Of Dr. Maryland's!—O that is good,' said Wych Hazel. 'Is she like Primrose?'

'She is more—like—a purple snap dragon,' said Stuart, reflectively. 'Do you read characters in flowers? and then look out for their moral prototypes in the social world?'

'I do not believe I ever had the credit of "looking out" for anything!—Good evening, Mr. Simms.'

'"It was the witching hour of night!"—quoted Mr. Simms with a deprecating gesture. 'Really, Miss Kennedy, I do not see why the story books make it out such a misfortune for a man to be turned to stone. I think, in some circumstances, it is surely the best thing that can happen to him. There is Nightingale, now—he would feel no end better for a slight infusion of silica!'—and with another profound reverence, Mr. Simms moved off.

'I should like to see the philosopher that would make an infusion of silica!' muttered Stuart. '*He's* never drunk it. What is the use of poets in the world, Miss Kennedy?'

'To furnish people with quotations—as a general thing,' said Wych Hazel.

'Precisely my idea. And that's stupid, for people don't want them. It looks bright out among Mrs. Powder's bushes—shall we go and try how it feels?'

It was pretty, and pleasant. Moonlight and lamps do make a witching world of it; and under the various lights flitted such a multitude of gay creatures that Mr. Falkirk's favourite allusion to Enchanted ground would have been more than usually appropriate. All the colours in the rainbow, gleaming by turns in all possible alternations and degrees of light and shadow; a moving kaleidoscope of humanity; the eye at least was entertained. And Stuart endeavoured to find entertainment for the ear of his companion. They wandered up and down, in and out; not meeting many people; in the changing lights it was easy to miss anybody at pleasure. In the course of the walk Stuart begged for a ride with Miss Kennedy, again negatived on the plea that Miss Kennedy's horses were not yet come. Stuart immediately besought to be allowed to supply that want for the occasion. His aunt had a nice little Canadian pony.

'I cannot tell,' said Wych Hazel, gaily. 'You know I must ask Mr. Falkirk.'

'You do not mean that?' said Stuart.

'Why of course I mean it.'

'Is it possible you are in such bondage? But by the way, there is going to be some singing presently, which

I think you will like. 'I have been counting upon it for you.'

'Is there?' she said,—'where? You are right in the fact, Mr. Nightingale, but quite wrong as to terms. I mean, the terms give a false impression of the fact. Where is the music to be, Mr. Rollo?' For Rollo, prowling about in the shrubbery, had at the moment joined them. He answered rather absently, that he believed it was to be in the garden.

'Do you understand, Mr. Nightingale?'—Wych Hazel resumed, turning to her other companion—'that is a mistake.'

'Can you prove it? But apropos, I am right in supposing that you are fond of music? That is true, isn't it?'

'Very true!'—But she was thinking.—'Mr. Rollo, how can you always say what you mean, without saying what you do not mean?' she asked suddenly.

'Choose your audience,' said Rollo.

'I like to say what I mean to anybody!'

'It is a great luxury. But the corresponding luxury of being understood, is not always at command. Have you been puzzling Mr. Nightingale?' he asked in an amused voice.

'Only presenting my ideas wrong end first, as usual. Is Miss Fisher here to-night?—and do you like her, Mr. Rollo?'

'Miss Fisher?—Kitty?—I have not seen her since I came home from Europe. But there is Prim. I must go and take care of her.'

He disappeared. The walk and talk of the two others was prolonged, until faint sweet notes of wind instruments from afar called them to join the rest of the world.

There was quite a little company gathered at this point, a small clearing in the shrubbery around one side of which seats were placed. Here the music lovers (and some others) were ranged, in a tiny semi-circle, half in shadow, half in light, as the lamps and moonbeams served. The light came clear upon half the little spot of greensward; glittered on leaves and branches beyond, glanced on the tops of trees higher up. A lively chitter-chatter was going on, after the fashion of such companies, when Wych Hazel came up, but a moment after the first notes of the music struck their ears, and all was as hushed as the moonlight itself. Only the notes of the harmony floated in and out through the trees; nothing else moved.

Mrs. Powder had managed to secure some good musical talent, for the performance was of excellent quality. Perhaps summer air and moonbeams helped the effect. At any rate, the first performance, a duet between a flute and a violin, was undoubtedly listened to; and that is saying much. The performers were out of sight. Then a fine soprano voice followed, in a favorite opera air.

Wych Hazel was seated near one end of the semi-circle, with Primrose just behind her; both of them in shadow. Rollo had been standing in the full light just before them; but during the singing he was beckoned away and the spot was clear. In two minutes more Stuart Nightingale had brought a camp chair to Wych Hazel's side. He was quiet till the song was over and the little gratified buzz of voices began. Under this cover he spoke low—

'Have you *two* guardians, Miss Kennedy?'

'One has answered all my purposes hitherto,' she

answered with a laugh. 'Do I seem to need another?'

'Seem to *have* another. Pardon me. Do you like to be taken care of?' He spoke in her own tone.

'By myself—best! If I must speak the truth.'

'Ah, I thought so! who else can do it so well? A fine woman needs no other control then her own. Am I to be disappointed of that ride?' He was speaking very softly.

'Well, I will prefer my request,' said Hazel. 'I wish I could say yes, at once. But how shall I let you know?'

Prim's hand touched her shoulder at this instant, for delicious notes of two voices stole upon the air from the hiding place of Mrs. Powder's troup. The lady's voice they had heard before; it was one of great power and training, and it came now mingling with a sweet full bass voice. There was no more talking until the music ended. It was a fine bit from a German opera.

'How do you like that?' Stuart asked.

Hazel drew a deep breath. 'Can you tell how you like things?' she said.

'Yes!' said Stuart. 'After we get that ride I am talking of, I'll tell you how I liked it. By the way, I will do myself the honour to be the receiver of your answer concerning it. But *this* pleasure—no,—yes, I *do* know why I enjoy it; but it is not because the voices are fine or the music expressive. Can you guess?

'*Not* for the music, and *not* for the voices!' said the girl looking at him.

'A puzzle, isn't it?' said Stuart. 'No; the music expresses nothing to me—this sort of music; and voices are voices—but—I care only for voices that I know.'

Another little word of warning from Prim behind her,—O Hazel, listen!'—prevented any reply; and Stuart's,

'Yes, this is something, now,'—made it unnecessary. And the singing would have made it impossible. A man's voice alone; the same rich, full, sweet bass; in the ballad of the "Three Fishers." Whether Mr. Nightingale had divined that somebody was near who knew Wych Hazel, or merely acted on general prudential motives, he left his seat and stood a little apart while the ballad was sung.

'Do you like that?' Primrose whispered.

'The voice—not the ballad.'

'Nor I either,' said Prim. 'I don't see what he sings it for.'

There was but a moment's interval, and then the same voice began another strain, so noble, so deep, so thrilling, that every breath was held till it had done. The power of the voice came out in this strain; the notes were wild, pleading, agonizing, yet with slow, sweet human melody. The air thrilled with them; they seemed to float off and lose themselves through the woods; sadly, grandly, the song breathed and fell and ceased. Wych Hazel did not speak nor stir, nor look, except on the ground, even when the last notes had died away. Only her little hands held each other very close, her cheek resting on them.

'Yes, I know,' said Primrose softly. 'That is Handel.'

Stuart Nightingale presently slid back to his seat; and now there came a stir; the music was discontinued. In a few minutes Rollo came bringing refreshments; Mr. Nightingale bestirred himself in the same cause; and presently they were all eating ices and fruits. At which juncture Miss Josephine joined herself to the party, with one or two more of her sort, while several gentlemen began to "fall in," behind Miss Kennedy.

'Did you have a good time at Merricksdale?' Josephine asked.

'Not better than usual,' Hazel answered.

'Danced, didn't you? I wanted mamma to have dancing to-night, and she wouldn't. She's so awfully slow! O Mr. Rollo, do you like dancing?'

'On anything but my own feet,' said Rollo.

'Anything but your own feet? How *can* you dance on anything but your own feet?'

'My horse's feet? Or what do you think of a good yacht and a good breeze?'

'Horrid! I never want to be in one. And *don't* you like dancing? O why? Don't you, Miss Kennedy? don't you, Mr. Nightingale?'

'Depends on the dance,' said Stuart. 'And on my partner.'

'O it don't signify what partner you have. In fact, you dance with everybody, you know. That is the best fun. Don't you like the German, Miss Kennedy?'

'Not with everybody,' said Miss Kennedy, thinking of possible partners.

'O but you must, you know, in the German—and that's the fun. I don't think anything else *is* fun. Of course the people are all proper. Don't you like the German, Mr. Rollo?'

'I do not dance it.'

'*Not*? Don't you? O why? You do dance, I know, for I've seen you; you waltz like a German, a man, I mean. Why don't you dance the German?'

'How does a German—a man, I mean—waltz, Miss Phinney? as distinguished from other nationalities? Stuart asked.

'O, different.'

'Wont you tell us in what way? This is interesting.'

'It wont help you,' said Josephine; 'and you dance well, besides. A German waltzes slow and elegantly.'

'And other people?'—

'You may laugh, but it's true; I've noticed it. An Englishman sways and a Frenchman spins, but a German floats. O it's just delicious! Why dont you dance the German, Dane Rollo? You're not pious.'

Rollo did not join in the general smile. He answered composedly—

'What I would not let my sister do, Miss Josephine, I am bound not to ask of another lady.'

'Why wouldn't you let your sister? You haven't got one, and don't know. But that's being awfully strict. I had no idea you were so strict. I thought you were jolly.'

'Could you hinder your sister?' Stuart asked with a slight laugh. The answer was, however, unhesitating.

'Why would you hinder her?' repeated Josephine.

'Ask Kitty Fisher.'

'Kitty? Does *she* know? And why shouldn't you tell us as well as her?'

Rollo took Miss Kennedy's plate at the instant and went off with it.

'That's all bosh,' said Josephine. 'I like people that are jolly. The German is real jolly. Last week we danced it with candles—it was splendid fun.'

'Not here?' said one of the gentlemen.

'Here? No. You bet. My mother is my mother, and nobody ever charged *her* with being jolly, I suppose.'

'How could you dance with candles?' said Primrose's astonished voice.

'Yes. Six of us had great long wax candles, lighted; and we stood up on a chair.'

'Six of you on a chair!'

'The old question of the schoolmen!'—cried Nightingale, bursting into a laugh.

'Of course on six chairs, I mean. Of course. Six of us on a chair!'—

'But what did you get on chairs for?'

'Why!—then the gentlemen danced round us, and at the signal—the leader gave the signal—the gentlemen jumped up as high as they could and tried to blow out our lights; and they had to keep step and jump; and if any gentleman could blow out the candle nearest him he could dance with that lady. Didn't we make them jump, though! We held our candles up so high, you know, they could not get at them. Unless we liked somebody and wanted him for a partner. O we had a royal time?'

'Did the gentlemen dance—and blow—indiscriminately?' inquired Miss Kennedy with a curl of her lips.

'No, no!—how you do tell things, Josephine!' said Miss Burr. 'Two gentlemen for each chair,—and whichever of the two put the candle out, he danced with the lady.'

'Kitty had four or five round her chair'—said Josephine.

'And couldn't the lady help herself?' inquired Primrose, in a tone of voice which called forth a universal burst of laughter.

'Why we *did*,' said Josephine. 'If you don't like a man, you hold the candle up out of his reach.'

'You couldn't baffle everybody so,' remarked Mr. Kingsland. Several gentlemen had come up during the talk, closing in around Miss Kennedy.

'Mr. Rollo is right about one thing,' said Miss Burr:

'nobody has seen the German who has not seen it led by Kitty Fisher. You should see her dance it, Miss Kennedy.

'Yes, you should,' echoed Mr. May, 'I had rather look on than be in it, for my part.'

'What do you think she did at Catskill the other day? said Miss Burr. 'She took a piece of ice between her teeth, and went round the piazza asking all the gentlemen to take a bite.'

'Clever Kitty! She'll work that up into a new figure —see if she dont,' —said Mr. Kingsland.

'To be called the *noli me tangere!*' said Mr. May. 'Partners secured at the melting point.' The other gentlemen laughed.

'I see you and Kitty are at swords' points yet,' said Miss Burr.

'No,' put in Rollo — 'she likes a foil better than a rapier.'

'Certainly it does not sound as if she was like you, Primrose,' observed Wych Hazel.

'Like Miss Maryland!—Hardly,' said Mr. May. 'Nor like any one *your* thoughts could even imagine,' he added softly.

It was growing late now, and the moon gradually passing along behind the trees, found a clear space at this point, and looked down full at the little party to see what they were about. Just then, from the distance, came a stir and a murmur and sound of laughing voices.

'She's coming this minute!' said Mr. Kingsland. "Talk about angels"!—Your curiosity will soon be fed, Miss Kennedy,—and may, perchance, like other things, grow by what it feeds on. Here comes the redoubtable Kitty herself!—Miss Fisher!—my poor eyes have seen nothing since they last beheld you?'

'Don't see much in ordinary,' said a gay voice; and a young lady,—too young, alas, for the part she was playing!—swept into the circle. A very handsome girl, with a coronet of fair hair, from which strayed braids and curls and crinkles and puffs and bands and flowers and ribbands; her dress in the extremest extremity of the fashion, very long, very low; with puffs and poufs innumerable; the whole borne up by the highest and minutest pair of heels that ever a beguiling shoemaker sent forth. She nodded, laughing, and held out her hands right and left.

'How d'ye do, Stephen? — Mr. Richard May!' — with a profound reverence. 'And if there isn't our Norwegian back again! Glad to see you, Mr. Rollo. Have you learned how to spell your name yet?'

But to this lady Rollo gave one of his Spanish salutations; while Phinny Powder jumped up and exclaimed with pleasure, and Primrose uttered from behind them her quiet 'how d'ye do, Kitty?' Wych Hazel on her part had risen too—drawing a little back from the front, in the sudden desire for a distant view first.

'I see,' Miss Fisher went on, speaking to Rollo.—'The *e* in the middle as usual, and the *i* and the *g* to keep it there. Why, Prim, my dear child!—you here? Among all these black coats of unclerical order?—How do you do?'—with an embrace. 'And how is my uncle?—But where is Miss Kennedy? I am dying to see Miss Kennedy!—and they told me she was here.'

'The time to die is—*after* you have seen Miss Kennedy,' said Mr. Kingsland.

'To my face!' said Kitty. 'Well!—That is she, I know, behind Mr. May. Introduce us Richard, please.'

Mr. May stepped aside, and with extreme formality

presented Miss Fisher to the lady of Chickaree. Kitty touched hands,—and paused, forgetting to take her own away. The young 'unwonted' face was certainly a novelty to her. And a surprise.

'We shall all be jealous of her for her little mouth,' was her first remark. 'Don't everybody generally kiss you, child, that comes near enough?'

Wych Hazel withdrew her hand, stepping back again in her astonishment, and surveying Miss Fisher.

'People do not—generally—come near enough,' she said, as well as it could be said.

There was a little round of applause from the gentlemen at that. Kitty Fisher nodded, not at all displeased.

'She'll do,' she said. 'I was afraid she was nothing but a milksop,—all strawberries and cream. I vow she's handsome!'

'Handsome is that handsome does,' said Rollo. 'Miss Kitty, will you sit down and take things calmly?'—offering a chair.

'Yes, I'll take the chair; and Miss Kennedy and I'll divide the civil speech between us,' said Kitty Fisher, placing herself close by Hazel. 'It's awfully nice here. What are you all about?'

'Just unable to get on for want of Miss Fisher,' said Stuart. 'Calling for you, in fact.'

'Echo answering "Where?" and all that,' said Kitty.

'Not at all. Echo said you were coming.'

'No dancing to-night?—awfully slow, isn't it? Beg pardon, Phinny; but you think just so yourself. Go off and start up the band into a waltz, and we'll have it out before the old lady gets the idea into her head. Come?'

Phinny started off on the instant with such energy and goodwill to her errand, that in a few minutes the burst

of a waltz air in the immediate neighbourhood of the parties requiring it, said that Miss Josephine had been successful. And she said it herself.

'There!' she exclaimed; 'we've got it. Mamma'll never care, if she hears, nor know, if she sees. Come! Here are enough of us.'

One and another couple sailed off from the group. Stuart offered his hand to Wych Hazel. 'You waltz?' he said.

She gave hers readily. The music had put her on tiptoe. And presently the little green was full of flying footsteps and fluttering draperies. As many as there was room for took the ground; but there was good room, and the waltz was spirited. Some stood and looked on; some beat time with their feet. In a shadow of the corner where they had been talking, stood Prim and Rollo; *not* beating time. Prim put her hand on his arm, but neither spoke a word.

'Shall we take a tangent,—and finish our stroll?' whispered Stuart, when they had whirled round the circle several times.

'If you like,—one is ready for anything in such a night,' said Hazel gleefully. She had gone round much like a thistledown, with a child's face and movement of pleasure So, suddenly and silently, as they were passing one of the alleys that led out from the little green, Stuart and his partner disappeared from the eyes of the spectators. It was certainly a pleasant night for a stroll. The light made such new combinations of old things, took and gave such new views; the pleasure of looking for them and finding them was ensnaring. Then the air was very sweet and soft, and—so was Stuart's conversation.

Gliding on from one thing to another, even as their footsteps went,—mingling fun and fancy and commonplace and flattery in a very agreeable sort of *pot-pourri*, —so they followed down one alley of the shrubbery and up another; winding about and about, but keeping at a distance from other people. Until, much too soon for Stuart's intent, they were suddenly and quietly joined at a fork of the paths by Rollo, with Miss Fisher on his arm.

As the waltz ceased, Rollo had secured without difficulty the companionship of Miss Fisher for a walk; and Miss Fisher never knew how peculiar a walk it was, nor imagined that her cavalier was following a very fixed and definite purpose of his own. Nothing seemed less purposeful than the course they took; it was no course; from one path diverging into another, changing from one direction to another; a hunted hare would scarce make more doublings, or anything else, except the dog in chase of the hare. Kitty only knew that she was very well amused; her companion never left that doubtful, nor allowed her much leisure to make inconvenient observations; and, in short, Kitty did not care where they went! —and Rollo did care. So it fell out, that quite suddenly, and as much to his companion's surprise as anybody's, quite easily and naturally they stepped out of one walk into another just as Wych Hazel and her attendant came to the same spot.

'Your old proverbs are all stuff,' Kitty was saying to her companion. 'I do think she's the prettiest thing I ever saw. Only she don't know her tools. Just wait till I've had her in training a while!'

'Miss Kennedy,' said Rollo, 'how would you like to be in training?' They had somehow joined company

with Stuart and Wych Hazel, not by the former's good will, but he could not manage to help it.

I may as well reserve my views on that subject for somebody who wants to try,' said the girl, with a laugh. She had not heard Kitty Fisher.

'On what point just now do you think you need it?'

'I am in an extremely contented state of mind "just now," thank you, Mr. Rollo.'

'Miss Fisher would not think that proves anything.'

'Does Miss Kitty offer her services as trainer?' asked Stuart.

'Now just wait, both of you,' said Kitty Fisher, 'and let Miss Kennedy get used to me a little. She's awfully shocked, to begin with; and you're trying to make believe she'll never get over it.'

A slight gesture of Miss Kennedy's head, unseen by Miss Kitty, seemed to say that was extremely probable.

'You should let her get accustomed to you by degrees' said Stuart. 'Hover about in the middle distance, suppose, without getting out of the range of vision—so that you may make your approaches to her heart through her eyes. That is an excellent way.'

'Is it?' said Kitty. 'You've tried all ways, I presume. But I notice that just now you seem to prefer the ear as a medium. Wouldn't she be splendid in the "Thread of Destiny," Stuart?'

'I should think so, if I were at the end of the thread!'

'You would not suppose it, Miss Kennedy,' said Rollo; 'but the "Thread of Destiny" is a silk riband. The destiny is not therefore always silken.'

'Much you know about it!' said Kitty. 'I just wish I could see you thoroughly wound up for once, with Bell Powder and two or three other people.'

Wych Hazel was growing rather weary of the talk. 'Who were the singers to-night, Mr. Nightingale?' she said, pitching her voice for his benefit alone.

'Really,' said he, in an answering tone, 'I am not musical enough to be certain about it. Voices in common speech I can understand and appreciate; but in this kind of manifestation—Mrs. Powder knows her business. She had secured the right sort of thing. The principal singer is a lady who has studied abroad; they are all visitors or dwellers in the neighbourhood. Did you like the performance?'

'Some of it; but the singing above all. You cannot understand that?'

'If you and Miss Kennedy want to whisper,' said Kitty Fisher, 'fall back a little, can't you, Mr. Nightingale? or turn down another path. It disturbs my own train of thought, this trying to hear what other people say.'

'Nobody would suspect Miss Fisher,' said Rollo, dryly, 'of being unwilling that anybody should hear what *she* has to say.'

'Do you know,' said Kitty, turning upon him with an emphasizing pressure of the arm she held, 'what my thoughts really *are* at work upon?'

'Yes.'

'Let's hear. Tell me, and I'll tell you.'

'I do not think,' said Rollo, slowly,—'it would be expedient.'

'Fudge! You know you couldn't. I have been trying to find out what so extremely sedate a person was after when he undertook to walk me round in the moonlight!'

And in defiance of everything, Wych Hazel's soft 'Ha! ha!' responded,—a little as if the question had perplexed her too.

'Have you had a good time?' said Rollo coolly.

'Very!—which makes it the more puzzling. Did Mr. Rollo ever walk with *you* in the moonlight, Miss Kennedy?'

'Yes.'

'Have a good time?' said Kitty.

The girl hesitated; but among her accomplishments the art of pretty fibs had not been included. The truth had to come out in some shape.

'So far as Mr. Rollo could make it,'—she said at last.

O how Kitty Fisher laughed! and the gentlemen both smiled.

'Why, that is capital!' she cried. 'I couldn't have done better myself!' Wych Hazel blushed painfully; but Rollo's answer was extremely unconcerned.

'I don't always give people a good time,' he said. 'You are fortunate, Miss Kitty. I am impelled to ask, in this connection, how long Mrs. Powder expects us to make our good times this evening?'

Upon comparing watches in the moonlight, it was found that the night was well on its way. There was nothing more to do but to go home.

On the way home, a little bit of talk occurred in the rockaway, which may be reported. Going along quietly in the bright moonlit road, Rollo driving, Primrose suddenly asked a question—

'Didn't you use to be a great waltzer, Duke?'

'A waltzer?—yes.'

'Then what made you not waltz to-night?'

Rollo leaned back against one side of the rockaway, and answered, while the old horse walked leisurely on—,

'I have looked at the subject from a new point of view, Prim.'

'Have you?—From what point of view, Duke?' said Primrose, much interested.

'I have made up my mind,' said Rollo slowly, 'I shall waltz no more,—except with the lady who will be my wife. And when I waltz with her,—she will waltz with nobody else!'

Prim sat back in her corner, and spoke not a word more.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS.

'AND how do you like your new neighbour, Prim?' said the young Dr. Maryland the first night of his return home. He had talked all tea-time to the collective family without once mentioning Miss Kennedy's name, and now put the question to his sister as they sat alone together in the twilight.

'O Arthur, *very* much.'

'You see a good deal of her?' was the next question, asked after a pause.

'Y—es,' said Primrose, doubtfully, 'At least, when I am with her I think I do; when I am away from her it seems little.'

'I must ride over there and call, to-morrow,' said Dr. Arthur. 'Will you go too?'

And so it fell out that Dingee was summoned to the door next day to usher in the party.

'Yes'm, Miss Ma'land—Miss Hazel, she in, sure!—singin' to herself in de red room,'—and Dingee led the way.

It was a new room to most of the guests. A room that seemed two sides woodland and one side sunshine. Walls with deep crimson hangings, and carpets of the same hue; and quaint old carved oak chairs and tables, and a bookcase or two, and oaken shelves and brackets against the crimson of the walls. The morning had been

cool enough, there at Chickaree, for a wood fire, though only the embers remained now; and in front of where the fire had been, sat the young mistress of the house half hid in a great arm-chair. Soft white folds fell all around her, and two small blue velvet slippers took their ease upon a footstool; with white laces giving their cob-web finish here, there and everywhere. A book was in her hand, and on her shoulder the grey kitten purred secure, in spite of the silky curls which now and then made puss into a pillow. Now and then. For while Miss Kennedy sometimes made believe to read, and sometimes really sang—pouring out scraps of song like a wild bird—yet in truth her attention was oftenest given to the great picture which hung in one recess. And then her head went down upon the grey kitten. Just now, when the visitors came in, she was searching for the notes of that last song at Mrs. Powder's; trying apparently, to catch it and bring it back; her girl's voice endeavouring to represent that which her girl's heart had never known.

The picture—I may describe it here—was that of a young man bound to a tree and pierced with arrows. No human witnesses in sight, except in the extreme distance; and over sky and earth no sunlight, but instead the deepening shadows of night. But the presence of the one was not noticed, nor the presence of the other missed. Away from earth, and lifted above suffering, the martyr's eyes looked to the opening clouds above his head, where were light,and heavenly messengers, and the palm-branch, and the crown. Something in the calm clear face checked Miss Kennedy's bursts of song as often as she turned that way—the high look so beyond her reach.

'What are you doing, Hazel?' said Prim's sweet voice.

'Puzzling,'—said Hazel, jumping up, and lifting one hand to support the kitten. 'Dr. Maryland, I am very glad to see you! O Prim, how happy you must be!'

'You didn't look in the least like a person in a puzzle, said Primrose, after the first compliments were passed. 'What could you be puzzling about, dear?'

'That picture. It always puzzles me. And so when I get befogged over other things, I often come here and add this to the number.'

'You are hardly far enough on in your studies yet, Miss Kennedy, to understand that picture,' said Dr. Arthur, who was considering it very intently himself.

'My studies! Painting, do you mean? Or what *do* you mean?' said Wych Hazel.

'What does the picture say to you, Miss Kennedy?'

'That is just what I cannot find out,' said Hazel, jumping up again and coming to stand at his side. I cannot read it a bit.'

'You have not learned the characters in which it is written, yet,' said Dr. Arthur, with a glance at her.

'She has not learned much,' said Primrose, smiling.

'Can *you* read it?' said Hazel, facing round.

'Why yes, Hazel.'

'Well,' said the girl, half impatiently, 'then how come I to be such an ignoramus?'

'There are some things,' said Dr. Arthur, with another swift look at his companion, 'which everybody can learn at once. But there are others, Miss Kennedy, which sometimes must wait until the Lord himself sets the lesson. I think this is one of those.'

'I shall ask your father,' said Hazel, decidedly. 'He always thinks I ought to know *everything* at once.'

'Oh Hazel, my dear, how can you say so?' cried Prim.

'Indeed, papa is never so unreasonable. And there he is this minute, and you can ask him.'

The long windows of the room looked upon a stretch of greensward spotted with trees. Coming across this bit of the grounds, Dr. Maryland and Rollo saw one of the windows open, and caught sight also of the party within. Even as Dr. Maryland's daughter spoke, they stepped upon the piazza and came into the room.

'That is a picture of the loss of all things,' Dr. Arthur was saying. 'How should you be able to understand?' But then he stepped back, and left the explanation in other hands.

'"The loss of all things!"' Hazel repeated, bewildered. 'How do you do, Mr. Rollo?—Dr. Maryland, there is always some special reason why I am especially glad to see you!'

'What is the reason now, my dear?' said the doctor, with a very benign look on his face.

'These two people,' said Wych Hazel, with an airy gesture of her head towards her other guests, 'find me in a puzzle and push me further in. And I want to be pulled out.'

'In what direction shall I pull?' asked the doctor.

'Well, sir,—O Mr. Rollo, don't you want the cat?—I know you like cats,' said Hazel, 'and she is in my way —It is only about my old picture here, Dr. Maryland, which they pretend to understand. Dr. Arthur says it means "the loss of all things,"—and that does not clear up my ideas in the least. Why must I "wait" to know what it means?' she added, linking her hands on the Doctor's arm, and raising her eager, vivid face to his. 'Prim says I "don't know much"—but I do not see why that should hinder my learning more.'

How strong the contrast with the martyr's face! how high and still and calm the look of him who had overcome! How tender, how open to sorrow, how susceptible of loss, that of the girl on whom as yet the rough winds had not blown! Dr. Arthur's eyes went soberly from one to the other. Rollo had taken the little cat from its position on its mistress's shoulder, and now stood with it established on his own, quietly and somewhat gravely attending to what was going on.

'What do you want to learn, my dear?' said Dr. Maryland, on his part gazing at the picture now.

'That picture always perplexes me,' said Hazel. 'What does it mean? And why do I love it so much, not knowing what it means?'

Standing and looking at the picture, Dr. Maryland answered in the words of Paul: '"What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'"

'But papa,' said Primrose, 'that doesn't tell her what it means. Didn't Arthur say right—"The loss of all things?'

'It means,' said Dr. Maryland,—'Human weakness and God's strength. Human emptiness and God's fulness. Earthly defeat and heavenly victory. How should you understand it, my dear, who have not begun the fight yet?'

'But then, papa, why does she love it so much?'

Dr. Maryland hesitated, and it was Rollo who answered:

'Because the fight is *in her*.'

'That's a queer way of putting it,' said Dr. Maryland; 'but perhaps it's true. I hope it is.'

The girl gave a swift look over her shoulder which it is to be hoped Mr. Rollo liked, as it was meant for him. So sparkling with the joy of being understood, so stirred with that sudden new life and purpose which appreciation wakes up in some natures. It was but an instant—then her eyes came back to Dr. Maryland, and were all quiet again. *He* did not think so, evidently. Which was right? Of what did he doubt her capable?

'Weakness,' 'emptiness,' 'defeat,' she said, recalling his words. 'Is *that* what I am to find?'

'You do not think it possible,' said Dr. Maryland.

'How should she, papa?' said Primrose.

'Well, my dear, it is not possible she should. And yet, Hazel, these are the only one way to find strength, fulness, and victory. It is a problem to you, my dear; only to be worked out.'

'Does *every one* work it out, papa?'

'No, my dear; two thirds of men never do. And so they go on forever saying, "Who will shew us any good?"'

'*He* did not find defeat,' said Hazel, looking at the martyr's face, and somehow forgetting the arrows and the cords.

'The story is,' said Dr. Maryland, 'that he was an officer, high in trust and command, in the service of the Emperor (Diocletian.) For owning himself a Christian, he was stripped of power and place, delivered into the will of his enemies, to be bound to a tree and shot to death with arrows. There is the human defeat, my dear Hazel. What you see in the face there, is the mental victory;—some of the struggle, too.'

"Mental victory"—she said half to herself, considering the words. 'I ought to be equal to that. Did you

mean "defeat," Dr. Arthur, by "the loss of all things?"'

'No,' said Dr. Arthur, 'I meant anything but that. I meant nothing worse than the exchange of a handful of soiled paper for both the hands full of solid gold.'

'Ah you all talk such riddles!' said the girl, knitting her brows. 'What would it be to me, I mean? That I should lose Chickaree?—but that is impossible.'

'It was said,' Dr. Maryland answered,—'and the Lord said it—"Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."'

'Yes, sir, but—' she said quickly,—then checked herself.

'Well, my dear? My words will come best in answer to your questions, for then they can meet the very point of your difficulty.'

'You will not think me disrespectful, sir?—I was going to say, *you* do not do that'—said Hazel, hesitating over her words. 'None of you. You have Prim and Dr. Arthur,—and Dr. Arthur comes home, and then Prim has her brother. And there is the pretty house, and books, and engravings. I don't know anything about Mr. Rollo, of course,' she said, correcting herself, 'but I mean the rest of you.'

'May we sit down?' said Dr. Maryland, 'Dane and I have walked up from Mr. Falkirk's. Unless Dane likes to stand to accommodate the cat!' said the doctor with a humourous glance at the shoulder where pussy sat with shut eyes, purring contentedly. 'It's a fair question, Hazel; and an easy mistake. But my dear, so far as I know, Prim and Arthur and I have not kept anything. For myself,' said Dr. Maryland, lifting up a bright face, 'all that I have is my Master's. I am not the owner

even of myself. So long as his service bids me use the things entrusted to me in the way I am doing, I will use them so. And whenever his honour, or his work, calls me to give up anything or everything of all these —my home, my children, or my own life—I am ready; it is the Lord's now; he shall do with them all what he will. Do you understand?'

'And Arthur and I would say the same,' added Primrose.

Her brother answered in the words so long ago written, so many times lived out. '"Not a myself—but Christ; not a my will—but Christ. Not a mine ease, or my profit, or my pleasure, but Christ.'"

The girl looked from one to the other, as each spoke, with a flash of sympathy; even as thoughts stir and kindle at the sound of a bugle call, while yet they know not what it says. But then she turned suddenly round and looked at Rollo. An expectant look, that waited for him to speak,—that gathered—or he fancied so—a shade of disappointment as it turned away again to the face on the wall. She sat silent, leaning her chin upon her hands. His look had been perfectly grave, thoughtful and quiet; but otherwise did not reveal itself. There was a general silence. Then Dr. Maryland said,

'Do you understand the paradox, my dear?'

'I think I must be the paradox myself,' Hazel answered with a half laugh. 'I could do that—I could bear the arrows: I think I could. But you never saw anybody, sir, that liked giving up—anything—less than I do.'

'You would rather bear the arrows than the cords, said Dr. Arthur Maryland. 'It is easier.'

'Depends on the people,' said Primrose.

'"As having nothing, and yet possessing all things,"' Dr. Maryland added rather dreamily.

'I suppose,' said Rollo, with a moment's deep look into Wych Hazel's eyes, 'the free spirit is beyond bonds.'

'That is it, my boy!' exclaimed Dr. Maryland. 'Think —when Paul and Silas were in the dungeon at Philippi, —a dreary place, most likely; and they, beaten and bleeding and sore, stretched and confined in the wooden frame which I suppose left them not one moment's ease, —at midnight it was, they fell to such singing and praising that the other prisoners waked up and listened to hear the song.'

Hazel crossed her slender wrists and sat looking at them, imagining the bonds.

'Do you think it is all *in me?*' she said, with another sudden appeal to Rollo.

Rollo was not a man fond of wearing his heart upon his sleeve. Another momentary glance went through her eyes, as it were, and was withdrawn, before he gave a short, grave 'yes.' Hazel went back to her musings without another word, and only the least bit of a triumphant curl about the corners of her mouth.

'I wonder how it would feel?' she said, crossing and uncrossing her hands.

'What?' said Primrose.

'Bonds—and chains,' said the girl, clasping her wrist tight. 'To have my hands tied!'

'You are not called upon to find out, my dear,' said Dr. Maryland; 'that is not required of you. But remember, Hazel, no bonds are heavy that love wears.'

'Depends upon how they get on, sir,' she said, quickly.

'What?' said the doctor, with a somewhat comic twinkle coming into his eye. 'How is that?'

'I hate bonds, Dr. Maryland!—from the very bottom of my heart.'

'You have never worn the sort I spoke of, my dear' he said, smiling. 'I never heard anybody complain of them.'

'What sort?' said Hazel. 'Bonds are bonds.'

'But love likes her bonds,' said the doctor.

The girl shook her head. 'She likes her way, sir! in my case. When Mr. Falkirk forbids me to—well, no matter what,—to do something,' she said, dropping her eyes, 'I do suppose I obey better than if I didn't love him. But I hate it all the same. It makes me feel—like my name,' she added with a laugh.

'Love likes her bonds,' the doctor repeated, shaking his head.

'And the arrow that is weighted flies freest against the wind,' Rollo remarked.

'What do you mean by that?' said Primrose. 'Duke, you look very funny with that cat upon your shoulder.'

'Pussy likes it,' said Rollo.

'Dane, have you finished your business with Hazel?' said Dr. Maryland. 'I must be going presently.'

'Well, sir—if Prim and Arthur will excuse me.'

He brought himself, pussy cat and all, to a chair by Wych Hazel's side. The others drew off a little.

'I am going away,' he said. 'Business takes me to New York for a week or two. Possibly to Chicago; but I hope not. I hope to bring your horses back with me. Do you want to give me any directions respecting them?'

'Directions?—I think not. O yes!' said Hazel, touching her fingers to the cat's head and instantly withdrawing them,—'I want my pony to be very fast. Because——' but there she stopped.

'Well?' said he.

'That is all.'

'It is unfinished.'

'Cannot you do anything without knowing why?'

'Unbusinesslike. But I'll do my best.'

'Well,'—said Hazel, 'I told Mr. Falkirk.—Of course I like to go fast, for its own sake,—and then if I ever had to ride for my life!'—

It was spoken so demurely that only her cheeks betrayed her. Over their treason the girl grew impatient.

'I just want a fast horse. Don't you know what that means, without explanation?'

'Why no,' said he, probably enjoying his advantage though he held it after his usual undemonstrative fashion. Excepting that his eyes took a further advantage which none others ever did. No flattery in them, nor conventional deference, and nothing like Dr. Maryland's benign regard, or Mr. Falkirk's watchful one. Those eyes went down into hers with a sort of grave taking possession, or holding it; something more than benignity, and coming much nearer than watchfulness. Rollo's manner had often an indefinable tinge of the same expression. 'There are so many sorts of fast horses,' he went on. 'Do you want to run for your life? or canter? or trot?'

'Trot in ordinary—run upon occasion.'

'Is trotting your favourite gait?'

'It is more like the wind,' said Wych Hazel. 'I remember one good canter—but all the rest made one think of the snail that went forward three feet and back two.'

'You must have had an experience! I'll try and secure both for you; but I may not be able, just at first. Don't you want to take pussy into safe keeping again?

I am afraid she would not approve of my further companionship.'

'Well—give her to me then,' she said, holding out her hands. He smiled a little at that, dislodged pussy and placed her in them, then rose up and offered his own.

A party of gentlemen came up the steps as Dr. Maryland and his companions went down. Clearly, the thoughtful time of the morning was at an end.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE GERMAN.

THERE come, sometimes, in certain lives, certain days and weeks which seem to be all adrift and beyond legislation. The people who might exercise control cannot; and the people will not who can; and so the hours sweep on in a rushing stream of events and consequences, which every now and then flings somebody upon the rocks. Or it may be, in very happy cases, only some *thing;* but until this is made sure the lookers-on feel anxious.

So felt Mr. Falkirk, a prisoner still with his lame ankle; so felt (probably) Mr. Rollo, called suddenly away by business a hundred miles off. So certainly felt Mrs. Bywank, watching her young lady with motherly eyes. But the young lady herself felt quite at ease, and as she had said, 'content.' Why not? With flowers by day and serenades by night; with game from every bag and trout from every hook; with cavaliers starting up out of greensward and woodland whenever she went out; with carriages and horsemen always at the door when she was at home. The serenades indeed were shared impartially with Mr. Falkirk and Gotham; for Wych Hazel still kept her room in the cottage, and was there by night. But the days were often spent in the house on the hill; and the distance between the two was often—to say the least—not made alone. The new saddle-

horses had not yet arrived, and no others were countenanced by Mr. Falkirk; but such walks had their facilities, even without the possible indoor extensions which sometimes took place. And for evening purposes an equipage had been arranged which relieved Miss Kennedy of all dependence on her neighbours. Mr. Falkirk's prostrate condition prevented her giving any entertainments as yet; but she went everywhere, with Gotham—grim and trusty—upon the box; and more and more the days, as they went on, brought everybody to her feet. It was excellent fun! For it is really delightful to be liked; and admiring looks that you cannot quite meet have yet their fascination, and the words you scarce hear have their charm. Altogether there was a strong flavour of enchantment abroad; and it seemed probable that the prince was somewhere. The princess had not seen him yet, that she knew of; but undoubtedly she was learning that some day she might. Yet Hazel took the knowledge in a pretty way. Too innately true to flirt, too warm-hearted to trifle, too real a woman to follow in the steps of Kitty Fisher; and, it may be said, thinking far too much of herself to descend from her vantage ground of feminine reserve. Perhaps there was no one thing which caught and *held* her admirers like this: the real girlish dignity which made them keep their proper distance. The most unscrupulous of them all would as soon have dared anything as to venture (to her) an unauthorized touch, or a word that savoured of freedom. So far, she went safe through the fire. If she could have known, poor child, what sort of a fire it was; if her thoughts had even dimly imagined what men old in the world may be; no kid glove nor silken tissue would have been deemed

thick enough to fend off the contact. But she knew nothing of all that, except by the instinct which now and then gave her a sudden sheer. As it was, she was intensely amused, and half out of her wits with fun and frolic and utter light heartedness; seeing no harm, imagining no evil; quite regardless of Mrs. Bywank's wise maxim that what men of sense disapprove, a woman—as a rule—had better not do. And for a while there were not men of sense at hand to give her counsel.

Mr. Falkirk looked on from too great a distance to point his strictures; Gotham's grumbles over the serenades and the cavaliers only helped the excitement. And since Mr. Falkirk would not let her fling her written thanks out of the window, the *spoken* thanks followed, as a matter of course, and effected quite as much.

And yet, you will say, no harm came, and everything was as it should be. Well, there are some who plunge through the mud ankle-deep; and there are others that go but over shoe; and here and there one that crosses on tiptoe; but you would rather that they all chose a better road. And intoxication is not a good thing, whatever may be the means thereto; and the sweet, fresh years of which Dr. Maryland had spoken, were quite too precious to be spun off to the music of Strauss, or wilted down by late hours, or given up wholly to hearing that Miss Kennedy was the one of all the world. Not so do natures enlarge and characters develop to their fairest proportions; not so do souls grow strong and noble for the coming work of life.

Kitty Fisher was not exactly jealous of all this,—or had too much sense to shew it; but deep in her heart she did wish she could dismount Wych Hazel from her pedestal, that comparisons might be made on level

ground. Kitty would not have been timid, for the world; and yet the shy blushes which came as freely as ever to Miss Kennedy's cheeks did somehow give her a pang. And while nothing could have bought off her daring speech and behaviour, she yet knew it *was* a pretty thing to have the deference which always approached the young lady of Chicharee.

'I must get that out of her,' she said to herself. 'She's bound to give it up. Wait till I get her fairly into the German!'

And so far she succeeded. Miss Kennedy did get 'fairly in,'—but as yet the rest of the plan had failed. Hazel danced, and led, and followed, in the wildest gaiety, within certain limits; beyond them she would not go; meeting all Kitty Fisher's proposals with a look of incredulous disgust and surprise that generally cut short the business for that time. And gentlemen who stood by laughed and applauded; and if Hazel had known just *why* they clapped hands, and just what she was avoiding, she would have wanted to stand no longer in their neighbourhood just then.

Balls followed dinners, and one German came close on the heels of another, with pic-nics, boating parties, croquet parties, and open-air breakfasts; and everywhere the young queen held her court; with beauty, and grace, and money, and a faultless toilet.

Now in the selfishness of this self-seeking world, our interest in a thing, our judgment of it, does very much depend upon its connection with ourselves. Have we any shares in the field for sale?—if not, why, manage it as you will, sunshine and clouds are alike to us. But if we have, the interest of the matter changes at once, and we are blind no more.

Following upon sundry other festivities came a brilliant German at Mme. Lasalle's. Thither came everybody, in proper time; thither, rather late, and fresh-returned from his journey, came Mr. Rollo; and making his way easily along, through rooms ablaze with light and almost faint with flowers, he reached a point where 'The Thread of Destiny' was in full progress, tangling itself up about Wych Hazel. It was impossible not to make her the centre of the group, though six ladies stood there together; and about them all, one end of a long white ribband in his hand, danced Mr. Nightingale—not saying, exactly—

> 'I wind, I wind,
> Hoping my true love to find'—

but perhaps thinking it in his heart; for when coil after coil had gone round the blooming prisoners, and the white sheen came suddenly to an end at Wych Hazel, it was with very evident satisfaction that Mr. Nightingale took her hand and led her out—his partner by the thread of destiny.

Nothing could be prettier than she was through it all; neither giggling nor smirking, nor making remarks like Miss Powder and the rest; her lovely shoulders veiled beyond all reach of criticism, her eyes intent upon the ribband, her thoughts intent upon the game. So that when all came to a climax at her, she laughed right out—the merriest laugh of glee and satisfaction. Very pretty!—was it anything more? Do you (apart from dancing) give your daintiest possessions into common hands? Why, you will not let a servant even dust the china shepherdess on your mantel-piece!—but any hands that you know—and any that you don't know—may touch and clasp and support the young daughters and

sisters of your love, and whirl them about the room, as you would not have your shepherdess treated for all the world.

Cajolements did not avail that evening to induce Mr. Rollo to dance; and they were tried. He was in what Wych Hazel might have called a very Spanish mood. Not to her; indeed he never approached her nor sought to interrupt the pretensions of those who crowded round her, courting her favour and worshipping her pleasure, and craving to be made ministers of the same. She was in a throng, and he did not try to penetrate it. Why he stayed so long was a mystery; for what is a German if you do not dance? He was not a mere idle spectator, nor idle at all, it is true; he made himself busy enough, taking elderly ladies to supper and serving younger ones with beef-tea; but those are not engrossing amusements. Mme. Lasalle declared he was very useful; and watched to see what it meant; but beyond that he could not be seen to look at anybody in particular, she could resolve herself of nothing. Certainly he took leave a little before Wych Hazel left the room; they were not together, the lady was sure.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE ROCKAWAY.

WHEN, however, a little later, that young lady came forth to her carriage, attended as usual by a retinue of servitors, a single figure was standing by her carriage door. He stood aside to let the devotees put Wych Hazel into the little rockaway which was her sole present equipage; but when the last words had been said and the last man stepped back, Rollo stood at the door before Dingee had time to shut it.

'Will you give me a seat as far as Mr. Falkirk's?' he said, looking in.

Now when you have not seen a person for six weeks or so, a request for a seat in your carriage is not generally the opening remark, and Wych Hazel paused in a sort of astonishment. Then another thing made her hesitate.

'If you will answer it to Mr. Falkirk,' she said. 'You know I am forbidden to give any one a seat in my carriage. Have you a special permit, Mr. Rollo?'

'I never ask for what I cannot have,' he said, jumping in. And then he offered her his hand. 'How do you do?'

'Very well. I should think that must make you an adept in Prim's beloved art of waiting,' said Wych Hazel.

'If the lesson must be learnt, I would rather wait

before asking. After that, I believe I do not know how to practise it. How do you feel about waiting for your horses?'

'Feeling is dead, and impatience is all tired out with hard work and want of sympathy. So it is pretty quiet just now.'

'Want of sympathy?' he said, inquiringly.

'Yes. I used to fume about it a little, but Mr. Falkirk only said "My dear," and a few other things of a cooing nature.'

'I believe I have brought you what you will like.'

'O, have you?' said the girl, with her musical intonations, and a degree of eagerness which spoke impatience in fair condition. 'You are very good to take so much trouble, Mr. Rollo! But I am more glad than you can imagine.'

'Then I am very glad,' said he. 'Will you trust me to drive you the rest of the way, if I displace Mr. Gotham? I share your infirmity of impatience sometimes.'

'An infirmity, you call it?—Well, displace anybody you like, but me,' said Wych Hazel, arranging herself in a small luxury of fatigue against the not too luxurious back of the rockaway. Her companion was silent a few minutes until the carriage passed out from the Moscheloo grounds and had gone a few rods; then he tapped Mr. Falkirk's factotum on the shoulder.

'Mr. Gotham,' said he, in tones of pleasant authority, 'I can't stand anybody's driving but my own to-night. Stop, if you please. You and Dingee may take a place with my man; my trap is just behind. Tell him to keep close and follow.'

'Sorry to do h'anything that looks un'ansome, sir,'

said Gotham, swallowing his surprise with the adroitness of long practice, 'but I 'ave Miss 'Azel in charge, sir.'

'You *had*, my friend. I will relieve you. Come, jump out, and don't keep your young lady waiting.' The voice was of calm authority which most people understand and obey. And Wych Hazel laughed.

'I'm sure I can't say what Mr. Falkirk will think, sir!' said Gotham, in a displeased voice. ''Owever—I will h'assume it's h'all right, sir.—Though why he couldn't drive his h'own team, if he'd such an 'ankering for the ribbands,' he muttered to Dingee as he got down, 'I'm sure is a perplexity.'

'Wanted to drive Missee Hazel,' said Dingee, climbing like a cat into the other conveyance, and proceeding to drive Mr. Rollo's man nearly out of his wits. 'You never does sound de gen'lman, Mas' Gotham. Telled you so long ago.'

Having got his wish, Mr. Rollo drove regularly enough for a mile or two; till all carriages going their way had passed before or dropped behind or turned off, and they had the road entirely to themselves. The moon was riding high, and though an old moon, gave enough light to make driving a thing of no difficulty. Thus far Rollo had driven in comparative silence, with only a word or two occasionally to Wych Hazel. He had not removed himself by any means out of her companionship, but throwing himself sideways on the front seat of the carriage, looked sometimes out and sometimes in. Now, when the road was their own, and the old horse could find his way along with very little guiding, and the moonlight seemed to illuminate nothing so much as the stillness, Rollo turned his head and spoke.

'Miss Kennedy, do you like to have people come suing to you with petitions?'

'I think I might—if I could answer them myself,' she said, thinking of some that had been preferred that night. 'But when my yes or no depends on somebody else, it is rather stupid. One tires of a perpetual referee at one's back.'

'This depends on nobody but you. But I am rushing into the middle of things,' said Rollo, giving the old steed an intimation that he need not absolutely fall back upon walking. 'Miss Kennedy, I am coming to you with a great petition to-night—and I am too impatient to wait for it.'

'Mr. Rollo with a petition!' said Wych Hazel. 'And impatient! Well—then why *does* he wait?'

His voice told well enough why he waited, at least in part; the earnestness of it was so blended with not a little anxiety and not a little tenderness. He spoke slowly.

'Miss Hazel,' he said, 'you have neither father nor mother nor brother nor sister. I am almost as much alone in the world. May I speak to you as one who knows what it means?'

'"It?"—being alone?' she said.

'Just that. Having no one near enough to care or dear enough to dare, what would be for your happiness. As it is so with you, and I know it, may I for once step into the gap, without being too severely punished by you for my venturing?'

'Why I thought you always ventured,—everything!' she said, sitting up now in her surprise.

'Then shall I make my petition? I never dared so much in my life as I am daring now.'

'Of course you may make it,' said Wych Hazel. 'As fast as you like. I shall begin to be impatient too.'

'If you choose to question me for my reasons, I will have the honour to give them. Or if you ask what right I have to move in the matter, I will answer that, too.'

'Beforehand?'

'Certainly. If you wish.'

'No matter,' she said, with a slight laugh which was yet a little disturbed. What *was* looming up behind this barricade of preliminaries? 'I thought you based your right just now— But never mind. Go on, please.'

He was silent nevertheless a minute, while the old horse came to an unchallenged slow walk. Then Rollo ungloved his right hand and held it out.

'I cannot see your face,' said he. 'Give me your hand, so that I may know, while I hold it, that you are not displeased.'

'Why, Mr. Rollo!' said Hazel, with the same half laugh, 'you are very—extraordinary! It strikes me your one petition covers a good many. Must I take the glove off?—if you are to be indulged.'

'There!' said he, taking her hand in the same warm firm grasp she had known before. 'I am going to ask you to promise me something—that it will not be pleasant to promise. Miss Hazel'—speaking low and slowly—'do not dance round dances any more!'

The tone was low, also it was very earnest and very grave.

'What?' she said, in a sort of but half comprehending way. 'Why not? what is the matter with them? I am hardly the least bit tired.'

'You don't know!' he said, with a slight pressure of

the hand he held. 'You don't know. This is why not, Miss Hazel—that I would not see my sister in them. Do you understand?'

'O yes,' she answered. 'I have seen people before who did not like dancing,—two or three, perhaps. But there is always somebody to dislike everything, I think. You do not enjoy it yourself, Mr. Rollo,—and so *you* do not know.'

'I have danced twenty dances where you have danced one. I know what they are made of. You only know how they look.'

'Hardly that,' said Wych Hazel. 'I know a little how they feel. I have never had an outside view, I believe.'

'Can you do me the great honour to take my view,—and my word for it?'

'If you liked flying to music as well as I do, you would take mine,' she said. 'Air is better than earth, when you can get it.'

'Do you think I would wish to interfere with your pleasure, or presume to interfere with your actions, without reasons so strong that I can hardly express their significance? Believe me, if you knew these round dances as well as I know them, you would never be mixed up in one of them any more.'

'Mixed up?' said Wych Hazel. 'Do you suppose I do all the wild things some people do, Mr. Rollo?'

'No,' he said; but he left his plea standing.

'Well then what is the matter? If ever you hear of my "exchanging hospitalities," I will give you leave for a lecture a mile long.'

'Your eyes are innocent eyes and do not see. Can you not trust me far enough to act upon my knowledge, and distrust yours?'

'But trusting you does not make me distrust myself,' she said. 'And even Prim confessed to me once that you do occasionally make mistakes.'

'I do not in this,' said he, very gravely. 'Yet there is no particular reason why you should believe me. Miss Kennedy—you cannot continue this pastime, and keep yourself.'

'What do you mean?' she said quickly.

'You cannot remain just what you are.'

'Mr. Falkirk thinks there is room for improvement,' said Wych Hazel, with some coldness; 'but your words seem to point the other way. Perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me at once all that you think it needful I should hear in the connexion.'

'You need not take that tone,' he said; 'but perhaps I *must* displease you. Miss Kennedy, I have always thought of you as one who would never permit a liberty to be taken with her.'

'I am happy that we agree for once,' she said, with a lift of the eyebrows and a voice to match. 'It is precisely the way in which I have always thought of myself.'

'Follow that out!' said he half laughing, and at the same time clasping a little closer the hand he held.

'Well—I have followed it out all my life. I never do, Mr. Rollo.'

'Not knowingly. But— How shall I tell you!' said he, in a sort of despair. And the old horse found it was necessary for him to move on.

'It must be said!' he broke out again, 'and there is no one but me to do it. Miss Hazel, you allowed liberties to be taken with you to-night.'

The little hand he was holding shrank perceptibly. Not twitching itself away, but as it were withdrawing

itself into itself, and away from him. Otherwise she sat absolutely still.

'Unconsciously,' he went on. 'You did not know it. The pleasure of the play kept you from knowing what it implied.'

'*Allowed*, did you say?'

'Look back and think,' said he, calmly.

'As if they could, without my knowing it!' she exclaimed. 'As if they would!'—

'Look back and think,' he said.

'Well,' said Wych Hazel, 'look back and think! And I find the most extreme deference, and—nothing else that touches the question.'

He drew a sort of short, impatient sigh, and waited a moment. Then leaned over towards her again and spoke slowly.

'Six weeks ago,' he said, 'two little hands would not come near enough to my shoulder to take the kitten from it. And I loved them for the distance they kept.'

The girl drew suddenly back, freeing her hand now with a swiftness that told of a deep hurt somewhere. For a moment she did not speak—then only a breathless—

'Well?'

'Is that displeasure?' he said.

'When have I shortened the distance?' But the words were defiant with pain, not anger. And Rollo on his part remained perfectly still and perfectly silent, not even seeming to know how the old horse was going to please himself.

Nothing could have been more still, outwardly, than the white-robed figure in the corner,—and nothing need be more inwardly tumultuous.

'If it was an open wagon,' she thought to herself, 'I should jump out—over the back or somewhere!' O this having men talk to one! And what was he talking about? and what had she done?—she who had done nothing! Except—'dance better than ever anybody danced before!' 'For the distance they kept'—and when did not her hands keep their distance from every one! How many times that very evening had she been voted 'cruel,' for refusing some favour which other girls granted freely? Mr. Rollo, too!—who had praised her 'womanliness'—But with that the womanish element prevailed, and there came a quiver of lip, and for an instant her hands were folded across her eyes. Then down again, to hold each other in order.

And yet her hand had been on twenty shoulders that evening, and twenty arms had encircled her!

There was an interval of some length.

'Miss Hazel,' said Rollo at length, and her voice was clear and manly, 'have I offended you?'

'No'—under her breath. 'I—suppose not.'

'Do you want me to give, if I can, some justification of myself?'

'There is none. Except that you did not mean to say what you said.'

'I meant no justification of my words,' said he, gently but steadily. 'If you want *that*, it is, that they were spoken to save you from harm.'

'Ah!' she said with a half cry,—then checked herself. 'What else does Mr. Rollo wish to justify?'

'Only my right to speak them;—if you did, as you might,—question it.' He paused a little, and went on. 'I can give you only half of my plea, but half will do. It is, that your father and mother dearly loved mine.'

It was all Hazel could do to bear her mother's name just then. Her hands took a sudden grip of each other, but no answer came. Not for some time: then words low and softly spoken—

'I think I asked for no plea, Mr. Rollo.'

'Then if you are content with it,' said he, in a lighter tone, 'give me your hand once more, only for a moment this time.'

She hesitated—then held it out. He bent down and gave it a swift, earnest kiss; after which he turned his attention to his driving duties, for some time neglected, till Mr. Falkirk's cottage was gained. As he took Wych Hazel out of the carriage, he said,

'It 's so late, if you don't forbid me, I am going up to my old friend, Mrs. Bywank, to ask her to give me lodging to-night.'

Hazel bowed her head in token that he might do as he pleased, giving no other reply. But it is safe to say that, by this time, ideas and thoughts and feelings and pain, and—'other things,' as she would have phrased it, were so inextricably mixed up in the girl's head, that she hardly knew which was which and which was not. She walked steadily in,—then gave about two springs to her brown corner room, and locked the door.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GERMAN AT OAK HILL.

MR. FALKIRK was not disturbed that night with being told anything. But when the sun had risen fair and clear over the green world of Chickaree, and Gotham moved silently about the breakfast table, Mr. Falkirk might notice from his sofa that but one cup and saucer stood on the tray, and but one plate near to bear it company. If Mr. Falkirk's nerves were not in order, they might have been tried; for Gotham certainly seemed to have borrowed the cat's shoes for the occasion.

'Why don't you set the table as usual?' came pretty peremptorily from the sofa.

'Miss 'Azel 'ave sent word she was h'asleep, sir,' said Gotham, with extra dignity.

'Then why don't you wait till she is awake, slowhead? as usual. It is not eight o'clock yet.'

'H'also that she 'as no h'intentions of h'ever waking h'up, sir.'

So Mr. Falkirk took his breakfast with a dissatisfied mind. For it is safe to say, he was so accustomed by this time to his gay little ward's company and ministrations, that coffee was not coffee without her. Gotham did his duty in a more than usually taciturn fashion, and Mr. Falkirk's breakfast was at an end before the factotum unburdened his mind.

'Beg pardon, sir,' he said, drawing himself up behind his master; 'but 'ow are your h'orders concerning Miss 'Azel to be h'understood, sir?'

'Orders?' said Mr. Falkirk.

'You distinctly said and h'indicated, sir, that I was to drive Miss 'Azel to and from, sir,—if my mind serves me,' said Gotham.

'And if my mind serves me, you have driven her forty times.'

'Quite correct, sir—and more,' said Gotham. 'The point h'is, Mr. Falkirk, what's to be done when young gents come taking the h'orders h'out of my very 'ands, sir?'

'Knock 'em down.'

'The first natural h'impulse, sir. But put a case that they're in the knockin' down style too?—then I'm left in the road, and Miss 'Azel without a protector.'

'Who's been knocking you down now, Gotham?'

'No one, sir;—I 'ope I know my business better,' said Gotham. 'I speak of the h'inevitable. And Mr. Rollo would drive Miss 'Azel 'ome last night, and she gave me no better h'assistance than one of her laughs, sir.' Clearly it rang in his ears yet.

'You had better not meddle with what don't belong to you, my friend. If Miss Hazel had desired *your* assistance, it would have been time enough to give it to her.'

'Very good, sir,—h'all settled, sir,'—and Gotham carried off the tray with a face of mixed perplexity and wisdom that was funny to see. But the sunshine crept on through the little study, and it was well-nigh time to set the table again, before the door opened softly and Wych Hazel came in: two exquisite roses in her cheeks, in her hand—by way of excuse—a basket of wonderful

hot-house grapes. How glad she had been to take them from Dingee at the door.

'Well, my dear!' said Mr. Falkirk, with an accent of unmistakeable pleasure, and something behind it, 'you have slept long to-day. Were you home so late?'

'I suppose it was late, sir. I lost no time, and so took no note. How do you do to-day, Mr. Falkirk?'

'Able to move, I think. I shall get about in a day or two more.'

'Here are some grapes, sir, to hasten the cure.' She put the basket in his hand, and passed on to a low seat at the head of the sofa. Mr. Falkirk looked at them, and his tone changed to the accustomed growl.

'Where are these from?'

'Major Seaton, I believe, is responsible,' said the girl carelessly.

'How many several people are after you at this present, Miss Hazel?'

'Difficult to say, sir, without more extensive inquiries than I have made. Your words do not put an attractive face upon the matter.'

'Is there any such thing in the lot?' asked Mr. Falkirk, discontentedly.

'As an attractive face? O yes, sir, several. Quite a number, I should say,' replied Miss Hazel, with a critical air.

'And all of them at Moscheloo?'

'All what, sir? Your English is hardly so pointed as usual—if you will excuse me for saying it.'

'You were speaking of attractive faces, my dear. I should say that your syntax wanted attention.'

'I did not know but you referred to "the lot,"' said

Wych Hazel. 'There was the usual mingling, I think, of attractive and unattractive.'

Mr. Falkirk was silent till dinner was served, and then attended to that.

'Mr. Falkirk,' Hazel began suddenly, when Gotham had retired, 'I believe you could move now. Come!—go with me to Oak Hill to-night,—will you, sir?'

'Oak Hill,' said her guardian. 'Mrs. Seaton's. What is to be done there?'

'A promenade concert—nominally.'

'That sounds something to me like a dancing dinner. What does it mean, my dear?'

'Just what I said, in the first place, sir. If Kitty Fisher and the Powders are there, it may turn into something else.'

'And what does a promenade concert turn into, when it is enchanted?' said Mr. Falkirk.

'A succession of dances—it might.'

'Well, my dear—what should I do in a succession of dances?'

She laughed,—just a little. Laughs were not ready to-night. 'Sit still, sir, and watch me.'

'It strikes me I do enough of that as it is, without going to Oak Hill. Do you want more than you will have to watch you?'

The word jarred. She was silent a minute. Then earnestly—

'I wish you would, Mr. Falkirk.'

A new expression on Mr. Falkirk's face shewed that a new idea had occurred to him.

'What does this mean?' he asked gently, bending on his ward one of his keen looks from under the thick eyebrows.

She answered without looking at him,

'It means what it says, sir.'

'What is the matter, my dear?' came more sympathizingly than Mr. Falkirk's wont. It was even a little low and tender.

'Why, Mr. Falkirk—is it such an unreasonable request, that you should be so keen after reasons?'

'I do not know that it is unreasonable, but you know that it is unwonted. You have not been apt to wish for more guarding than you have had, Miss Hazel. Cannot you tell me what makes you desire it now?'

Mr. Falkirk did not growl now, nor draw his brows together; he was in patient earnest, seeing cause.

'I did not say to guard me, sir. Sometimes,' said Hazel, choosing her words, 'sometimes it might be pleasant to have somebody in the room to whom I was supposed to belong—just a little bit. How do you like Major Seaton's grapes, Mr. Falkirk?'

Mr. Falkirk drew his brows together now, and spite of his weak ankle got up and paced across the floor thoughtfully. Then came to a sudden stop in front of Wych Hazel.

'Has anybody annoyed you?' he asked.

'By "annoyed" you mean?—'

'Made you feel the want of a protector; or of somebody, as you say, that you belong to.' Mr. Falkirk's brows were drawing very thick together indeed.

'No, I think not,' she answered. 'Not intentionally. People are very good to me; very respectful, I believe. But I must go and see that my dress is in order. I shall wear blue to night, Mr. Falkirk—and you like blue.' She made him a profound little courtesy, and danced off out of the room.

Mr. Falkirk's cogitations, to judge by his eyebrows, were also profound, when his ward had left him alone. They did not issue in any resolve to re-enter the gay world, however, which had never been Mr. Falkirk's sphere; and Miss Kennedy went to Oak Hill alone. Had she been made to 'feel her want of a protector?'—On the contrary!—Or 'annoyed' in any other sense?—that was far too soft a word. And so she stepped from her carriage in company with many thoughts, and came out upon the assembled light and colour as stately as if she had been the only right line in the universe. A bevy of her friends were round her directly.

'Hazel,' said Phinny Powder, 'we are going to run this concern into a German as soon as it has run long enough in its own name. I am so glad you are here; and in blue. Keep near me, won't you, because it'll just set me off, and some dresses kill me.'

'How can she keep near you, you giddy creature?' said Mme. Lasalle. 'Hazel' (whispering), 'Stuart bade me engage you to lead the German with him. May I tell him you will?'

'O Hazel,' cried Josephine again, 'we are going to have such fun. Kitty is going to let us into some new figures, and they are considerably jolly, I tell you!'

'Are they?' said Hazel. 'But the music comes first, Mme. Lasalle, and I may not stay for the German. And I have promised the first walk to Mr. May.'

'Not stay for the German!'—'*Not* stay for the German?' was echoed in so many various tones of despair that it had to be answered again.

'I only said I might not,' said Wych Hazel. Good evening, Mr. May.'—And Miss Kennedy swept off, to the opening burst of music from the band.

Now there are other sounds besides music at a promenade concert, and many things not strictly harmonious are said and done under cover of its trombones and violins. Wych Hazel indeed walked unremittingly,—it suited her mood that night; but many sat and talked, very regardless of the music, and not too mindful of other ears. And so after a while a group gathered round Kitty Fisher, to discuss the coming German and pick up a few hints touching the promised new figures. Wych Hazel had just passed, escorted on either hand: her dark-blue robe and white laces setting her off to perfection. For a minute eyes alone were busy.

'That girl provokes me to death with her high dresses!' said Kitty Fisher. 'Such ridiculous nonsense!'

'I'm not so sure as to that,' said Miss May. 'Dick raves about it.'

'Dick raves about her altogether,' said Kitty,—'so of course he has to include her dress.'

'Well, George said that other shoulders might as well retire if her's ever came fairly out,' said little Molly Seaton, who was taking her first sips of society, and looked up to Miss Kennedy as the eighth and ninth wonder of the world combined.

'I don't care,' said Kitty Fisher, 'I'll have 'em out! I vow I will. It's a fraud on society.'

'Society can afford to be a loser now and then,' said Mr. Kingsland, softly insinuating himself among the ladies;—'it gets so much more than its due between whiles!'

'It's prudish,' said Phinny, disregarding this sentiment,—'that's what it is. Do you suppose it's that old wretch of a guardian keeps her in leading strings? Now she talks of not staying to the German.'

'The Sorceress is in one of her moods to-night,' said Mr. Kingsland.' Murky. Flashes coming so thick and fast, that I declare I've been winking all the evening.'

'Stephen,' said Miss Kitty, 'if you'll help get up the "Handkerchief" by and by, and get her into the thick of it before she knows where she's going, I'll give you the first pair of blue gloves I can spare.'

'Great offer,' said Mr. Kingsland; 'but to-night the Sorceress prefers walking.'

'Stuff!—who cares what she prefers?'

'Some nine-tenths—and a fraction—of all the men here,—myself included,' said Mr. Kingsland.

'You are the fraction, or you'd manage it,' retorted Kitty. 'It's doubtful if she *would* dance with *you*.'

'She will not dance with anybody this night,' said Mr. Kingsland.

'How do you know?'

'Said so. And what Miss Kennedy has said, she does.'

'Why, she *couldn't* dance in that long train,' said Molly Seaton.

'Little goose!' said Kitty Fisher, 'she would hang *that* over her partner's arm.'

'Would she!' said Mr. Kingsland, with a slight whistle. 'I asked her to do it once: I think I shall not again.'

'She'd rather talk to six men than dance with one, I suppose,' said Miss Fisher, eyeing the girl who stood now leaning against a tree in the distance.

'And the post of the seventh looks so inviting!' said Mr. Kingsland, rising and strolling off.

'Isn't it too much!' said Kitty Fisher. 'See here

girls and boys, listen,'—and heads and voices too went down below recognition.

A little later in the evening, Gotham from his seclusion in the servants' quarters was summoned to speak to a lady. He found awaiting him, not his mistress, but a wonderful pyramid of white tarletan from which issued a voice.

'Miss Hazel is going to spend the night with Mrs. Seaton, and she sends you word that you may go home and come back for her at eight o'clock in the morning.'

'Ain't that clever?' said Phinny to the cavalier on whose arm she leaned, as they retraced their way towards the lighted portion of the grounds. 'Now I have disposed of one trouble.'

All unconscious of this machination Wych Hazel kept on her walk—the only thing she could decide to do to-night. In fact the girl hardly knew her own mood. Of course the strictures that had been made were all unfounded, as touching her; but the words had given such pain at the time, that the very idea of dancing made her wince as if she heard them again. That would wear off, of course, but for the present she would walk; and had, as Molly guessed, put on her long train as a token. But when the concert began to tend towards the German, another fancy seized her: to stay and look on, and get that outside view which was almost unknown. And so when the first set was forming she released Major Seaton for his partner, and again took Mr. May's arm and walked towards the dancers.

'My dear,' said Mme. Lasalle, coming up on the other side, 'are you not dancing?'

'As you see, Madame!' said Hazel, with a slight bend and laugh.

'*You* not dancing! What's the matter!'

'Well—you will find it is a freak, or I tired myself last night, or I want to make a sensation—according to whom you ask,' said Wych Hazel.

'You are not forbidden?' whispered the lady, in a lower tone.

'No, Madame.'

'You seem to have so many guardians,' the lady went on,—'and guardians are selfish, my dear; horribly selfish. For that, I think all men are, whether guardians or not.'

'Just now,' said Wych Hazel, 'I am the selfish one,—keeping Mr. May from dancing.' Which supposed view of the case Mr. May, like a wise man, did not try to answer—just then.

The German began. One or two ordinary figures first, but watched by Wych Hazel with eager eyes.

'Yes, of course!' she said to herself, as Kitty Fisher went round with her head on her partner's shoulder,—'if he thought I did that.' *Could* he think it?—the little white glove tips so nearly withdrew themselves from the black coat-sleeve they were touching, that Mr. May turned to ask if she was tired and wished to sit down.

But motions that were pretty to look at followed: each couple in turn passing through an avenue of little coloured flags, which, held out by the motionless couples on either side, met and crossed over the heads of the dancers. Down came Stuart Nightingale and Miss Fisher, and Mr. Burr and Phinny Powder, and Major Seaton and Miss May,—Wych Hazel looked on, smiling, and with a stir of her little right foot. How often she had come down just so! Then began a figure that she

did not know: they were going to 'practise,' Kitty Fisher called out, recommending her to come.

'You won't know how next time.'

'Thank you, I can learn by looking on.'

And so she stood still and watched. Watched to see the ladies, armed with long reins and a whip, driving their partners cheerfully from point to point, with appropriate gestures and sounds and frolic. The little bells tinkled gleefully, the many-coloured leading-strings mingled in a kaleidoscope pattern.

'Symbolical,' Mr. Kingsland remarked, standing near. 'This is the "Bridle" figure, Miss Kennedy.'

'Unbridled' would be a better name, Miss Kennedy thought, but she said not a word; only her lips curled disdainfully. But, 'driving men is easy work,' as Phinney Powder said, and so this 'practice' soon gave way to another still more striking. The ladies ranged themselves, standing well apart from each other, and among the gentlemen was a general flutter of white handkerchiefs. What were they going to do? 'Bonds' was the word that occurred to Hazel this time, as she stood leaning a little forward in interested expectation. And so it proved,—but not just as she had expected. To be tied by the hand would be bad enough, but by the foot! —and yet,—yes, certainly Major Seaton's handkerchief was round Kitty Fisher's pretty ankle—to the discomfiture of several other handkerchiefs of like intentions, —and Miss Powder had Stuart Nightingale at her feet, —and Phinny—

But who did it for whom, Wych Hazel scarcely thought until afterwards. She looked on for a minute at the scuffling, laughing, romping; then drew back with a deep flush.

'Did they think they could do that with *me!*' she said, under her breath. And what could her companion do but feel ashamed of every man he had ever seen do 'that' for any woman?

The course of things was changed after a time by Mr. Nightingale's coming up and asking her to walk. He had made over the 'practice' to somebody else, professing that he knew the figures already. Perhaps somewhat in his companion's manner struck him, for he remarked, quite philosophically, as they moved into the shadow of the shrubbery, that 'society is a problem!'

'Is it?' said Hazel, to whom problems (out of books) were as yet in a happy distance. 'What needs solution, Mr. Nightingale?'

'Is it possible you do not see?'

'Not a bit. I did not know society was deep enough to be called a problem.'

'"Glissez, mortels; n'appuyez pas."'

'Well, people do not,' said Wych Hazel.

'And had best not. Nothing is more graceful than the state of bold and brave innocence.'

Hazel mused a little at that, half unconsciously getting up a problem of her own. Was he talking of *her* 'innocence?' did he, too, see things which she did not? And was this another warning? Yet no one more forward to draw her into round dances than Stuart Nightingale. He began again in another tone.

'You are determined not to dance to-night?'

'Yes. Am I part of the problem?'

He laughed a little. 'You would not be a true woman if you were not.'

'You may as well give up trying to understand *me*,'

said Wych Hazel, gaily. 'Mr. Falkirk and I have been at it for years, and the puzzle is a puzzle yet.'

'Confess, you like to be a puzzle.'

'One may as well make the best of one's natural advantages,' said Hazel with a laugh. 'I suppose if I were what people call "limpid," and "transparent," I might like that too.' But the clear girlish purity of the depths referred to was as transparent as the Summer blue.

'Have you ever been told,' said Stuart, lowering his voice a little, 'of your very remarkable resemblance to one of the greatest puzzles of history?'

'No,' said Hazel. 'And you do not know me well enough to tell what I resemble.'

'Pardon me—pardon me! Do you think I could not have told, after that one first meeting in the wood?'

'If you could,' said Wych Hazel, with a lift of her eyebrows, 'I cannot imagine how society can be a problem to you, Mr. Nightingale.'

'There never was but one woman, of those whose pictures have come down to us, whose mouth could be at once so mischievous and so sweet. You are aware the mouth is the index to the character?'

Hazel answered with some reserve (direct compliments always gave her a check)

'No—Yes. I have heard people say so.'

'And you know the woman I mean?'

'She is bound to be a witch!—but further than that—'

'The likeness is really remarkable,' said Stuart, seriously; 'you have the Mary Stuart brow exactly, and the mouth, as I said; and I think, as far as difference of colour admits similarity of effect, the eyes have the same trick of power. I suppose you like power?'

'I suppose I should! Mr. Falkirk ties up all *my* power, and labels it "Edge tools,"' said Wych Hazel.

'I suppose it cuts its way out, and so justifies him. Don't you have your own way generally?'

'Well, between taking it, and coaxing it out, and refusing to take any other, I do have it sometimes,' said Wych Hazel.

'Is Mr. Falkirk much of an ogre? I do not know him. Difficult to manage?'

'He thinks I am,' said Wych Hazel. 'No, he is not an ogre at all, except officially.'

'Does he pretend to exercise much supervision over your doings?'

'Pretend?' she repeated. 'He has the right, Mr. Nightingale. And did ever a man have a right and not give it an airing now and then?'

Stuart laughed, and laughed again. 'Don't be hard on us!' he pleaded.

'Truth is not slander.'

'But are not women as fond of power, and wont to exercise it as ruthlessly, as ever men are?'

'It is not as strong power, if they do.'

'Take care,' said Stuart. 'Honour bright!—while Mr. Falkirk *thinks* things go according to his will, don't they really go by yours?'

'No,' said Wych Hazel, 'when he *thinks* they do, they *do*,—when they do not, he knows it.'

'Then you are *not* free. That is hard!—hard upon you. A mother's authority is one thing; a guardian's, I should think, is something very different. Does he interfere with your dancing?'

'No.'—Hazel herself hardly knew why words suddenly became scarce.

'I thought you were very fond of it.'

'O, I am!'

'Then why will you not honour me and please yourself to-night?'

'"Why" is safe, while "why" keeps hid. All women know that,' said Wych Hazel.

'You best of all,' said Stuart. 'I dare say it is just to make us miserable. But now I am coming to you with a more serious request. Will you help us in some private theatricals?'

'I?—O, I could not. I know nothing about the matter. Never went to a theatre in my life, to begin with.'

'So much the better. I know you will do it to perfection. In the first place you are not vain; and in the second place you are independent; and an actor should be free in both respects. And of positive qualifications you are full. Say you will try!'

'I am the worst person to make believe that ever you saw,' said Wych Hazel. 'I doubt if I could counterfeit anybody else for ten minutes.'

'Precisely!' said Stuart in a contented tone. 'You would not counterfeit. Good acting is not counterfeiting—it is nature. You will help us? Say you will!'

'O, if I can—certainly.'

Before Wych Hazel's lips had fairly got the words out, the two found themselves suddenly flush with Mr. Rollo, standing by the side of the way under a laburnum tree, which was hung with lights instead of its natural gold pendants.

Swiftly as only thoughts can, they rushed through the girl's mind on the instant. Then he was here! And of course he knew she was not dancing,—and of *course* he must think—There was another figure beginning—,

she might go and join that. No !—not with him to look on, making mental comments: that would be simply unendurable. Then she must tell him it was not for what he had said. And she could not tell him that, because it was !—Only in a different way. And how was she to talk to him of 'ways,' or of anything else, after last night? The result of all which lucubrations was, that she bent her head gravely—and it may be said somewhat lower than usual—in silent acknowledgment of Mr. Rollo's presence. She was desperately afraid of him to-night. But though he stepped up and spoke to her, it was in the indifferent tone of ordinary business.

'On my way here I got something that I think I ought to give to you. By and by, when you are at leisure, will you command my presence?'

'I can take it now.'

'No,' said he carelessly, 'I will not interrupt you. I should have to explain. I will be on the lawn in front of the concert-saloon when you want me.'

He bowed and fell back from them.

'Have you *two* guardians?' said Stuart slyly.

'No.'

'Just a little more assurance than necessary, in his communication.'

'What do you consider the proper amount?' said Wych Hazel, retreating to carelessness in her turn.

'I should not dare offer any,' said Stuart. 'It is with nothing of the kind that I venture to ask if you will ride with me to-morrow.'

'Ah, I would if I could!' said the girl longingly. 'I would give almost anything to be on horseback again. But my horses have not come, and till then I must wait.'

'Let me offer one of my aunt's horses!' said Stuart eagerly. But Hazel shook her head.

'I cannot take it—Mr. Falkirk will let me mount none but my own.'

'Is it reasonable to yield obedience so far, and with so little ground?'

'It is comfortable,' said Hazel with a laugh. 'O yes, I suppose it is reasonable, too.'

The walk went on and the talk; each in its way wandering along through moonlight and among flowers, and then Hazel bethought her that what she had to do must be done before she went home. So mustering up her courage, she seated herself on one of the broad stone steps at the side door, and despatched her escort to the front for Mr. Rollo. Presently he came, and sat down beside her.

'At what hour did you order your carriage?' he asked in a low tone.

'Gotham was to wait.'

'He has gone home. I met him as I came.'

'Gone home? O he is only driving around to keep his horse awake. It is not a fiery turnout, by any means.'

'He has gone home,' Rollo repeated smiling, 'and I did not know enough to order him about again. But I sent word to Mr. Falkirk that I would take care of you.'

The girl's brows lifted, then drew slightly together.

'Thank you—,' she said, with rather stately hesitation, —'but as Mr. Falkirk will send Gotham straight back, I had better wait.'

'After my message, Mr. Falkirk will not do that,' said Rollo, looking at his watch. 'It is half-past twelve o'clock.'

Hazel leaned her chin in her hand and looked off into the moonshine. She did not feel like being 'taken care of,' a bit, to-night.

'I am afraid circumstances are affecting Mr. Falkirk's mind,' she said at last, with a tone just a trifle provoked; for half-past twelve was a stubborn fact to deal with. 'Well, Mr. Rollo—if I can by no means save you the trouble, at what hour will it please you to take it?'

'As there are evidently plots against you, suppose you come to the other side-door, and let us go off without speaking to anybody?'

And so it came to pass that in a few minutes more they were comfortably driving homewards, without supervision, the silent groom behind them not counting one.

They were in a light phaeton, with a new horse in it which could go; the old moon was just rising over the trees; the road free, the pace good. The gentleman's tone when he spoke was rather indicative of enjoyment

'Who is plotting against you?'

'Plotting!—'

'And now disappointed?'

'O, it is just some of Gotham's stupidity,' said Wych Hazel, with a voice not yet at rest: she had been oddly conscious of wishing that no one should hear her whispered good-night to Mrs. Seaton and follow to see with whom she went home. 'He and I are always at cross purposes.'

'A lady in a white dress brought him the message, he says. But to change the subject—What is your favourite pleasure?'

'Riding the wind.'

'Do you remember once—a great while ago—promising to give me an afternoon some time?'

'Did I? it must have been a great while,' said Wych Hazel. 'O yes, I do remember. Well?'

'Will you put to-morrow afternoon at my disposal?'

'If the thing to be done is within walking distance. Mr. Falkirk will not let me ride.'

'I have brought home, I think, a nice little saddle horse, which I should like to have you try,' Rollo went on, not heeding this.

'Oh!' she said, with unmistakeable longing. 'But he has made me refuse at least five-and-forty just such horses this summer.'

'He will be amenable to reason to-morrow,' said Rollo comfortably. 'Shall I tell you what I want to do with you after I have got you on horseback?'

'Let me run—I hope,' said Wych Hazel.

'I am going to take you where you have never been yet; through Morton Hollow and the mills, to see my old nurse, who lives a little way beyond them.'

'I am not going through Morton Hollow,' said Hazel, decidedly.

'Why not?'

'You never heard of seven *women* who could "render a reason," did you?' said the girl, with a laugh in her voice.

'My old nurse is a character,' Rollo went on. 'She is a Norse woman. My mother, I must tell you, was also a Norse woman. My father's business at one time kept him much in Denmark and at St. Petersburg; and at Copenhagen he met my mother, who had been sent there to school. And when my mother forsook her country, the old nurse, not old then, left all to go with her. She was my nurse in my earliest years, and remained our most faithful friend while we were a family

She made afterwards a not very happy marriage; and when her husband died just before I went to Europe, she was left alone and poor. I arranged a small house for her in the neighbourhood of the Hollow; and there she lives—a kind of mysterious oracle to the people about. And her greatest earthly pleasure, I suppose, is to have me come and see her. Gyda Boërresen is her name.'

'I like to see people enjoy their greatest earthly happiness,' said Hazel thoughtfully. 'I never did many times. Or at least not many people.'

'I want you to know Gyda. I am not superstitious, like some of the ignorant people who visit her; but yet'—he paused. 'If ever you were in need of womanly counsel—if ever you wanted sympathizing and wise help—to find your way out of perplexities—I should say, go to Gyda. If any one could give that sort of help, she would. And it is almost like going to a pythoness,' added Rollo thoughtfully; 'she is so cut off from the world and its people.'

They were almost at Mr. Falkirk's cottage. Rollo was silent a moment, then said, 'May I ask Mrs. Bywank to shew me hospitality again to night? I don't want to go home.'

'Mrs. Bywank will be only too glad,' said Wych Hazel. 'The little tower room always goes by your name, Mr. Rollo.'

'She did not put me there the last time,' said he, laughing, 'I was lodged in state and splendour! Well, good night. I wish you were coming to breakfast.'

She stood silent a minute, looking down. Could she? Might she? Would it do? Run away from Mr. Falkirk for a private frolic on the hill? It was a great temptation!

And only doing the honours of her own house, when all was said. Would it be strange? Would he think it strange? That is, not Mr. Falkirk, but Mr. Rollo. Was he a man of sense, she wondered, who always disapproved of everything? And with that a child's look of search and exploration sought his face. There was a grave sparkle in the eyes she met looking down at her.

'I see a question in your face,' said he. 'And I answer,—yes!'

'Very unsafe to answer anything in my face,' said the girl, hastily withdrawing her eyes. 'There were *two* questions in my mind. Good night, Mr. Rollo, and thank you.'

'Think better of it!'—said Rollo, as he got into the carriage again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BREAKFAST FOR THREE.

MRS. BYWANK, inspecting her breakfast table from time to time, certainly had Mr. Rollo's wish in her heart, even though it got no further. And setting on orange marmalade for him, she pleased herself with also setting on honey for *her;* even though the portrait of a little child was all the sign of her young lady the room could boast. But long habit had made it second nature to watch that face, no matter what else she was about. Mrs. Bywank looked and smiled and sighed, and bent down to see if the honey was perfect. It was late in the morning now: Mr. Rollo's slumbers had been allowed to extend themselves somewhat indefinitely in the direction which most men approve; and still breakfast waited, down stairs; and Mrs. Bywank at the tower window gazed down the slope and over the trees towards Wych Hazel's present abiding place. Not expecting to see her, but watching over her in her heart. So standing, she was hailed by a cheery 'good morning' behind her.

'I suppose people who turn day into night have no right to expect the day will keep its promises to them; but you are better than my deserts, Mrs. Bywank. I see a breakfast table!'

'Always ready for you, Mr. Rollo! And you must be very ready too, by this time,' she said, sounding her

whistle down the stairs. 'Was Miss Wych at Oak Hill last night, sir?'

'I had the pleasure of bringing her home.'

'O, did you, sir?' said Mrs. Bywank, with a qu ck look. 'She told me she meant to go,—but her mind comes about wonderfully sudden sometimes. Here is breakfast, Mr. Rollo. Will you take your old seat?'

'I think it will always come about in the right place at last,' said Rollo, as he complied with the invitation. The old housekeeper drew a sigh, looking up at the little picture.

'My pretty one!' she said. Then applied herself to filling Mr. Rollo's cup. 'Yes, sir, you're right,' she went on after a pause. 'And she never would stop in a wrong one, not a minute, but for just a few things.'

'Mrs Bywank,' said the young man, 'those few things are all around her.'

'You'd think so if you could hear the serenades I hear,' said the housekeeper, 'and see the flowers — and hear the compliments. She tells them to me sometimes, making fun. But the trouble is with Miss Wych, she never will see the world with any eyes but her own, —and who's to make her?'

A problem which Rollo considered in silence, and probably swallowed instead of his coffee.

'Does she speak freely to you of her impressions, and of what she is doing or going to do?'

'Free as a child, Mr. Rollo! Always tells me what dress she'll wear—and then afterwards how people liked it. And what she does, and what they want her to do. And why her head is not turned,' said Mrs. Bywank, in conclusion, 'puzzles *my* head, I'm sure. Mere handling so many hearts might do it.'

Mr. Rollo pursued his breakfast rather thoughtfully and nonchalantly for a time.

'Mrs. Bywank, Mrs. Coles is returned.'

'Surely!' said Mrs. Bywank, with a slight start. 'Then she'll make mischief,—or it'll be the first chance she ever missed.'

'And—the world around her is not so simple as your young lady believes.'

'No, no!' said Mrs. Bywank, earnestly. 'Well I know that! But just there comes in another trouble I spoke of,—you can't make her believe it, sir,—and so I'm not sure it's always wise to try.' She paused, in a sort of hesitating way; glancing from her teaspoon to her guest.

'It's not wise to try at all,' said he, smiling—a sort of warm genial smile, which went over the table to his old friend. 'At the same time,'—and his face grew sternly grave,—'it may be desirable to have some other wisdom come in to her help. I wish,—if you are in any doubt or perplexity about anything you hear, and it may be only a little thing that may give you the impression,—I wish you would call me in.'

'Well sir,—that just touches my thought,' said Mrs. Bywank. 'Or my thought that. For I couldn't do it, Mr. Rollo, unless,'—and an unmistakeable look of anxious inquiry came across the table. 'Unless, you know, sir,' she went on, looking away again,—'unless—excuse my freedom—the conditions of the will are to be carried out.' And the old housekeeper called for hot waffles, and otherwise apologized for touching the subject, by quitting it at once. As soon as all this bustle was disposed of, her guest met her eye again with a frank, bright smile.

'The conditions of the will are to be carried out, my friend.'

Mrs. Bywank brought her hands together with a sense of relief and gladness that somehow went to her eyes too, and she was silent a little.

'I did hope it, sir!—And I would far rather apply to you than to Mr. Falkirk. *He* frets me sometimes,' added the old housekeeper: 'I may say that to you, sir. Now, she's been wild to ride all summer,—and a dozen wild to have her; and Mr. Falkirk has never let her go once. And so long as he *does* let her go and dance with the same people, I don't for my part see why.'

'Perhaps he does,' said Rollo, rather dryly. 'But I have made the requisite declarations in presence of Mr. Falkirk and Dr. Maryland, and am legally qualified to act, Mrs. Bywank. *She* does not know anything of this; and it is not best she should—for the present.'

'No sir—by no means.' said Mrs. Bywank, earnestly. 'For if there is anything Miss Wych does hate it is to have a gentleman speak to her about her doings. When *that* happens she thinks she's supposed to have done something dreadful; and it hurts her more than you would guess, sir. Little child as she was then, she would cry her eyes out over a word from Mr. Kennedy, but her mother might say anything. And it has always been just so with Mr. Falkirk. Only Miss Wych never cries for *him*. At least nobody ever sees her.'

Now, instead of Mr. Rollo's being alarmed at this, as another man might, it was answered by a certain humourous play of face; a slight significance of lip and air, quite difficult to characterize. It was not arrogant, nor arbitrary; I do not know how to call it masterful; and yet certainly it expressed no dismay and no apprehension.

Perhaps it expressed that he intended to be in a different category from other men. Perhaps he thought Mrs. Bywank meant to read him a cautionary lesson.

'She is in rather a hard position,' he said, gravely. 'I am glad she has got a good friend in you, Mrs. Bywank. And I am glad *I* have, too.'

'Yes, it is hard,' said the old housekeeper, with a glance at him; 'though it is not to be expected, sir, that you should quite understand it. But Miss Wych is the lovingest little creature that ever lived, I believe, and as true as the sky. Why, she could cheat Mr. Falkirk day in and day out if she chose!— but if ever those young men *should* get her to ride, against his orders, she would go and tell him of it, the first minute after she got home.'

Rollo did not ask whether they could do this, or had done it. He went on quietly with his breakfast, only glancing up at Mrs. Bywank to let her see that he was attending to her.

'So that's a great safeguard,' she began again, with a sigh. 'But I wish Mrs. Coles was back in Chicago! Miss Fisher was bad enough. And what the two will do between them—'

'What does Miss Fisher do?'

'It is plain to me,' said Mrs. Bywank, 'that she wants to pull my young lady down to her way of dress and behaviour; though Miss Wych don't guess it a bit. *That* she can never do, of course. But it is just like Miss Fisher to push where she can't pull. Do you undersand me, sir?'

'Quite.'

'So that makes me anxious, sir. And there are hands enough to help.'

Leaning somewhat towards her young guest, breakfast rather forgotten on both sides, so they sat; when the door opened softly and Wych Hazel came in. But if the first minute inside the door could have been instantly exchanged for the last one outside, it is probable that the young lady of Chickaree would have disturbed no cabinet council over her that day. For with the first sight of the very people she expected to find, there rushed over her a horrible fear that Mr. Rollo would think she had come to see *him*!—and that Mrs. Bywank would think so—and (worst of all) that she thought so herself! But there was no retreating now. So passing swiftly to the old housekeeper's chair, and laying both hands on her shoulders to keep her in it, Hazel stooped down to kiss her; and then straightening herself up like a young arrow, she gave from behind Mrs. Bywank a demure good-morning to Mr. Rollo.

That gentleman had not been so much engrossed with the conversation as to have at all the air of being 'surprised,' or he was too good a man of the world to shew it. He had sprung up instantly as Wych Hazel came in, and now he came round to where she stood to shake hands, looking very bright, but as if her appearance was the simplest thing in the world.

'You have not had breakfast?' he said.

'I have had the opportunity. But you look altogether too comfortable here, you and Mrs. Bywank!—As for me, I have been breakfasting with two bears, and had nearly forgotten how civilization acts.'

'My dear!' said Mrs. Bywank.—'Not "breakfasting"—when you were coming here, Miss Wych?'

'Not much, Byo, to say the truth. I gave Mr. Falkirk *his* coffee—hot and hot.'

'He didn't give you waffles,' said Rollo, making room for her plate and cup upon the table. 'Mrs. Bywank, we must take care of her. I shall never grumble at sending answers to invitations after this.'

He was rendering little services and making himself variously useful, with the air of a person more at home than she was: drawing down a blind to keep the sun from her face, and opening another window to let in the air and the view.

'Take care of me!' said Wych Hazel, with a look at the table instead of at him, and then beginning to touch and mend things generally to suit her fancy. 'It is very plain what *I* have to do! There is the jar of marmalade quite pushed out of reach. And if you do not empty it, Mr. Rollo, Mrs. Bywank will think you have not fulfilled the sweet promise of your earlier years.'

'My dear!' remonstrated Mrs. Bywank, uneasily.

'I have satisfied her,' said Rollo, dryly. 'But there is a little left for you. There wouldn't have been if the two bears had known where it was.'

'Mr. Falkirk was fearfully growly this morning,' said Wych Hazel. 'And every time he growled Gotham grumbled. So I had a fusillade. Where is your fruit, Byo?'

'There was none brought in yesterday, Miss Wych, I'm sorry to say.'

'None at all in the house?'

'There's a basket in your room, my dear; but of course'—

'Not "of course" at all,' said the girl, jumping up to go for it. 'you know that is a sort of fruit I never eat.'

Which might have left it doubtful what sort she *did* eat,—the basket contained so many, in such splendid

variety. Hazel sat down in her place and began to pile up the beauties in a majolica dish.

'Aren't you going to give me some?' said Rollo, looking on.

The answer tarried while Hazel's little fingers dived down after peaches and plums of extra size with which to crown her dish; but so doing, they suddenly brought up a white note, suspiciously sealed with red wax. The girl dropped it, as if it had been a wasp; and hastily setting the basket down on the floor, pushed the unfinished dish to a position before Mr. Rollo.

'There!' she said, 'will that do?'

'Do you mean that you give me all these?'

'Every bit.'

'Mrs. Bywank, might I make interest with you for a finger-glass?'

Which being supplied, the gentleman proceeded to a leisurely ablution of his fingers, and then looked at the dish of fruit before him with grave consideration.

'Which is the best?' said he.

'They all look about alike, to me,' said Wych Hazel, raising her eyebrows, 'I shall be happy to hear, when you have found out.'

Exercising a great deal of deliberation, Rollo finally chose out a bunch of Frontignac grapes and two Moorpark apricots, and set them before Wych Hazel.

'Will you accept these from me?' he said, coolly. 'They are my own property, and are offered to you. Taste and see if they are as good as they ought to be.'

She looked up, and down, laughing.

'That is the way you come round people! Will you take the responsibility? Suppose I am asked, some day, whether they—were—what they ought to be?'

'You can puzzle him just as well after knowing the fact, as before,' Rollo said, with perfect gravity.

'Well,' said Hazel, pulling a grape from the bunch. 'Perhaps my misleading powers may be equal to that. This one is quite good—and not at all sour,' she added, with a flash of her eyes—which, however, went to Mrs. Bywank. 'What do you want, Dingee?'

Dingee advanced and laid a card on the table.

'Say I am at breakfast. I cannot be expected to keep awake all night and all day too.'

'Permit me to inquire,' said Rollo, as he also attacked the grapes, but not looking at them, 'whether you did your share of growling this morning? I am sure no one had more cause.'

'No,' said the girl, laughing. 'I feel that I have a great reserve in store for somebody. Well, Dingee?'

A card with a written message this time. Hazel looked at it, drew her brows together, and, seizing a pencil, wrote a vigorous 'No,' across the lines.

'For somebody,' Rollo repeated. 'I am not sure that we got hold of the right delinquent. After all, peaches are the best thing after waffles and coffee. Try that.' And he placed a fine one alongside of Wych Hazel's plate.

'The thing is,' said Wych Hazel, 'that unless you can growl with authority, nobody marks you.'

'General Merrick and Major Seaton, Missee Hazel, ma'am,' said her dark retainer, coming back.

'I thought I told you I was at breakfast?' said Hazel, in a tone of displeasure.

'Yes'm—but de Major he bound to know 'bout sumfin Missee Hazel left onsartin last night. 'Spect he'd like a keep-sake, too,' said Dingee, laying down another card 'Mas' May put *his* away mighty safe.'

If ever his little mistress was near being furious, I think it was then. Eyes and cheeks were in a flame.

'I left nothing uncertain last night!' she said, turning upon him. 'Major Seaton knows that, if he will take the trouble to remember. And Dingee, if you bring me another message—of any sort—before I whistle for you, I will put you out of service for a month. Now go!'

'Is that the way you punish unlucky servitors?' said Rollo, looking much amused.

She had come back to her grapes, giving them the closest attention, feeling shy and nervous and disturbed to any point; but now fun got the upper hand. So first she bit her lips, and then — the laugh must come! Clear and ringing and mirthsome, as if there was never a growl in all the world.

'That is one way,' she said.

'Sounds peaceable,' said Rollo demurely, though smiling; 'but I don't know! I am afraid it might prove very severe. What is the appeal from one of your sentences?'

'There is none. I am a Mede and a Persian combined. Byo, why don't you give Mr. Rollo some cream with his peaches, and postpone me till another time.'

'She'll have to postpone me, too,' said Rollo. 'I must go. Shall I come for you at four o'clock? It will be too hot, I am afraid, before; and we have a good way to go.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

JEANNIE DEANS.

IT wanted some time of four o'clock yet, when Miss Kennedy came quietly into Mr. Falkirk's study and sat down by the window.

'Are you at leisure, sir?' she said, intertwining her fingers in a careless sort of way among the vines that hung there.

'My dear, I have been at leisure so long that I wish I could say I was busy. But I am not busy. What is it, Miss Hazel?'

'Only a few business questions, sir,' she said, attending to the vines. 'Will you let me ride with Major Seaton on Thursday?'

'Would you like to go with him?'

'I always like to ride, sir.'

'You have not a horse yet, my dear; that is a difficulty. I do not know this Major Seaton's horses—nor himself.'

'Quite reliable, sir—according to him. Will you let me ride with Mr. Rollo this afternoon?'

'I suppose there is no good reason to be assigned against that,' said Mr. Falkirk, rather growlingly, and after a pause. It sounded a little as if he would have liked it if the fact had been otherwise.

'You consider Wednesday a more safe day than Thursday, sir?'

'I am not superstitious, Miss Hazel. The only thing I ever was in fear of is enchantment!'

'Well sir,—you have doubtless studied the case enough to know which is the more "enchanting" of the two,' said Miss Hazel, daringly. 'Shall I give Mr. May a ride on Friday?'

'Will you have a horse on Friday?'

'My horse seems to be a slow one, by the time it takes him to come,' said Wych Hazel. 'Will he be here this afternoon, Mr. Falkirk?'

I suppose Rollo will see to that,' said Mr. Falkirk, beginning to turn about some papers that were on the table.

'Yes, sir,' said his ward, with her small fingers still playing among the vines; 'I suppose he will. It is rather Mr. Rollo's style. But that makes it slightly awkward for me, Mr. Falkirk.'

'In what respect, Miss Hazel?'

'Most of these other gentlemen think themselves qualified to "see to" so small a consignment as myself; and not being posted as to your scale of enchantment and danger, may feel it the reverse of a compliment to meet me riding with Mr. Rollo, on his horse.'

'Well, my dear, what do you wish me to do in the matter? You are not obliged to go with Rollo, that I know of. Do you wish to compliment these other small fry?'

'I want to ride, Mr. Falkirk! I believe I should go with Mr. Simms—if he were the only chance; and that is saying a good deal. However, I can throw all the responsibility on you, sir; that is one comfort.'

'It won't break me,' said Mr. Falkirk; 'that is another. Why do they all come for you so, this hot weather!'

But she laughed at that, and went off out of the room.

When she came down to the side entrance of Chickaree some hour or two later, she found her side-saddle going on an Arab-looking brown mare, and Rollo playing hostler. His own horse standing by was clearly also a new comer; a light bay, nervous and fidgety, for he did not keep still one minute; ears, hoofs, eyes and head were constantly and restlessly shifting. The brown mare stood still, only lifting her pretty head and looking as Wych Hazel came out. She ran down the steps.

'I got leave!' she said, gleefully,—'did you?'—then stopped, surveying operations. 'But was there nobody about the place to do that but Mr. Rollo?'

The quiet negative which answered this covered more ground than the question. Rollo finished his work carefully, with one or two looking on; mounted the little lady, and went to his own horse. Before mounting, here, he seemed to hold some conversation with the creature; caressed him; stood in front and spoke to him, patting and stroking his head; then in another moment was on his back.

There is a great difference in people's riding, as there is in people's walking; and once in a while, among plenty of good average walkers and riders, there is one whom it is a pleasure to see. This man was such a one. He was a perfectly well-made man, and had the ease and grace in all his movements which such a build goes far to ensure; when on horseback it seemed as if he had communicated these qualities to his horse, and the two moved as one embodiment of ease and grace, with power superadded. Stuart Nightingale on horseback was a fine gentleman, perfectly got up, and riding well, but yet a fine gentleman in the saddle. Major Seaton rode ruggedly, if I may say so. Mr. May was more at home in his

phaeton; others were more or less stiff and uncertain. But the attitude and action of Rollo were utter unconscious ease, whatever form of action his horse might take. So it was now. For a few minutes his restless animal moved in all sorts of eccentric ways; but where most men would have been a little awkward and many very miserable, his rider was simply unconcerned and seemed to be taking his pleasure. To see such a rider is to be filled with a great sense of harmony.

What a ride they had then, when the hill was descended and the gates of Chickaree left behind. The road for some miles was known to Wych Hazel; then they branched off into another where all was new. The qualities of the brown mare had been coming to her rider's knowledge by degrees; a beautiful mouth, excellent paces, thorough training; knowing her business and doing it. As they entered upon a long smooth stretch of road without anybody in sight, Rollo proposed a run; and they had it; and it was upon drawing bridle after this that he asked a question.

'How do you like her?'

Now Miss Kennedy, in defiance of all well-known laws, had never been so smitten with the regulation beaver upon a man's head, as to place it on her own. So instead of its stiff proportions she wore a little round straw hat; utterly comfortable, utterly graceful, and drooping down over her eyes *à la* Marie Stuart, so as to keep those wayward things in deep seclusion when she chose. Just now, however, she turned them full on her companion, answering:

'O *very* much!—I suspect she has only one fault.'

'What in the world is that? Have you discovered already what I have sought for in vain?'

'It is the reverse of my specialty,' said Wych Hazel —'so perhaps that makes me sharpsighted. I am afraid she always behaves well.'

'She knows her business,' said Rollo. 'I think what you want her to do, she will do. Pardon me; do you wish her—it is rather paradoxical—to *thwart* your wishes?'

'No,' said the girl, laughing a little,—'I put it some what differently: perhaps I might like, just occasionally, to thwart hers!'

'She'll be an extraordinary animal if she does not some time or other give you a chance. Now do you know what you are coming to?'

The scenery was changing, had changed. The level, open road they had been clearing on the gallop, had gradually drawn within high banks, which as they went on grew higher and broken, till the country assumed the character of a glen or deep valley. Opening a little here and there, this valley shewed ahead of them now a succession of high, long, dingy buildings; and a large, rapid stream of water was seen to run under the opposite bank. It had not been visible until now; so it probably turned off near this point into an easier channel than the course of their road would have afforded. The scene was extremely picturesque; sunshine and shadow mingling on the sides of the dell and on the roofs and gables of the buildings in the bottom. These were both large and small; it was quite a settlement; cottages, small and mean and dingy, standing all along on the higher banks, as well as lower down near the stream. Gradually the dell spread into a smooth, narrow valley.

'The mills, I suppose? I have not been this way before. It makes me half wild to get out again! So if I do any wild things——How lovely the dell is!'

'This is Morton Hollow,' said Rollo, looking at her 'Can I help you do any wild things?'

'The houses are like him,' said Hazel, turning away, and her colour deepening under the look. 'Such a place!'

She might say 'such a place.' As they went on the character of it became visible more and more. There were dark, high, close factories, whence the hum of machinery issued; poor, mean dwellings, small and large, clustered here and there in the intermediate spaces, from which if any sounds came, they were less pleasant than the buzz of machines. Scarce any humanity was abroad; what there was deepened the impression of the dreariness of the place.

'Mr. Rollo,' said Hazel, at last. 'I hope your friend does not live down here?'

'I don't think I have any friend here,' he answered, rather thoughtfully. He had been riding slowly for the last few minutes, looking intently at what he was passing. Now, at a sudden turn of the road, where the valley made a sharp angle, they came upon an open carriage standing still. Two ladies were in it. Rollo lifted his hat, but the lady nearest them leaned out and cried 'Stop, stop!'

A gentleman must obey such a behest. Rollo wheeled and stood still.

'Where are you going?' said the lady. Probably Rollo did not hear, for he looked at her calmly without answering.

'Is that the little lady?' said the speaker, stretching her head out a little further to catch better sight of Wych Hazel. 'Aren't you going to introduce me, Dane? I must know her, you know.'

It is quite impossible to describe on paper the flourish with which Rollo's horse responded. Like a voluntary before the piece begins, like the elegant and marvellous sweep of lines with which a scribe surrounds his signature, the bay curvetted and wheeled and danced before the proposed introduction. Very elegant in its way, and to any one not in the secret impossible to divine whether it was the beast or his rider at play. Finally brought up on the other side of Wych Hazel, when Rollo spoke.

'Miss Kennedy, I have the honour to present Mrs. Coles, who wishes to be known to you.'

As Miss Kennedy bent her head, she had one glimpse of a long pale face, surrounded with bandeaux of fair hair, which looked towards her eagerly. Before she had well lifted her head again her horse was moving, and the next instant dashing along at full speed; the bay close alongside. The mills were almost passed; a very few minutes brought them quite away from the settlement, and they began to mount to higher ground by a steep hilly path.

'Well!'—said Hazel, looking at her companion.

'Well?' said Rollo, innocently.

She laughed.

'As if I did not know better than that!'

'I wish I did,' said Rollo. 'Now, do you know what you are coming to?'

'No, not a bit. I said I wouldn't come through that place—but when you are in a strange land—and in charge of a—strange!—cavalier—'

'You are coming to the house of my old nurse in the hills a quarter of a mile further on. I did not understand you to mean that you would not go through *that* place.'

'Does the man keep another Hollow for himself?' said Wych Hazel. 'I am glad we are going to the hills, if only to help me forget the valley. How can people live so! And oh! how can people let them!'

'This is a concomitant of great civilization. I saw no such place when I was in Norway,' Dane observed.

'And was—what is her name?—living there when you came home?'

'Gyda? Down in the Hollow! O no. I had established her up here in comfort before I left her.'

More and more lovely, wild and lonely, the scenery grew; the road getting deeper among the hills and winding higher and higher with the head of the valley. Then they came to the cottage, the only one in sight; a low house of grey stone, set with its back against the woods which covered the hill. A little cleared and cultivated ground close to it, and in front the road. Rollo dismounted, fastened his horse, and took Wych Hazel down.

'Do you like to come to such places?' he asked as he was tying the brown mare to the fence.

'I know very little about them,' she said. '*This* looks like a place to come to.'

'It is unique,' said Rollo, as he led the way in.

He opened the door softly. An utterance of joy Wych Hazel heard, before she could see the person from whom it came. Rollo turned and presented Miss Kennedy then. It was that. He did not present old Gyda to *her*. And then Wych Hazel was established in the best chair, and could look at her leisure, for at first she was not the one attended to.

She saw a little person, with a brown face, much shrivelled; which yet possessed two sparkling keen black

eyes. There was not a pretty feature in the old woman's face, for the eyes were not beautiful now, in any sensuous meaning of beauty. And yet, as Wych Hazel looked, presently the word 'lovely' was the word that came up to her. That was of course due only to the pervading expression; which was pure, loving and refined far beyond what the young lady had often seen. She was dressed in a short jacket of dark cloth, braided with bright braid, and fastened at the throat with a large silver brooch. Her petticoat was of the same cloth, drawn up plain over the bosom in an ungraceful manner; her head was covered with a coloured handkerchief, tied so that the ends hung down the back.

After seeing Wych Hazel seated, she for the moment paid her no further attention. Rollo had sat down too; and the old woman came close in front of him and stood looking silently, her head reaching then only a little above his shoulders. She was old, undeniably; however, it was an entirely vigorous and hearty age. Her hand presently came to Rollo's face, pushing back the thick and somewhat curly locks from his temples, and then taking his head in both hands she kissed first one cheek and then the other.

'Don't be partial, Gyda!' said he, smiling at her. And if there was beauty of only one kind in the little black eyes that looked at him, there was much of both kinds in the young man's face. Gyda left him and went over to her other visitor.

And as far as minuteness of examination went, certainly she was not 'partial.' It would have been a bit trying from anybody else—the still, intent, searching look of the old woman upon the young face. But the look was one of such utter sweetness, so thoroughly lov-

ing and simple and kind, if it was also keen, that there was after all in it more to soothe nerves than to excite them. Her hand presently came to Wych Hazel's face too, drawing down over the soft cheek and handling the wavy ringlets, and tracing the delicate chin's outline. Slowly and considerately.

'Is she good?' was the first word that Gyda spoke in this connection, as näively as possible. It was rather directed to Rollo. The girl's colour had stirred and mounted under the scrutiny, until interest nearly put shyness out of sight; and the winsome brown eyes now looked at Gyda more wistful than afraid. They followed her question with a swift glance, but then Miss Kennedy hastily took the matter into her own hands.

'Not generally!' she answered, the lips parting and curling in sweet mirthful lines that at least did not speak of very deep wrong-doing. Most gentlemen probably would have uttered a protest, but Rollo was absolutely silent. Gyda looked from one to the other.

'Why are ye no good?' she asked, with her hand on Wych Hazel's shoulder. The expression of the words is very difficult to describe. It was an inquiry, put with the simplest accent of wondering and regretful desire. Hazel looked at her, studying the question rather in the face than in the words.

'I suppose,' she said slowly, 'because I do not like it.'

'You must know, Gyda,' said Rollo, smiling, 'that Miss Hazel's notion of goodness is, giving up her own will to somebody else's.'

'And that's just what it is, Dane Olaf,' said the old woman, looking round at him. 'Ye could not have expressed it better. But that is not hard, nor uncomfort-

able, when ye love somebody?' she added, her sweet eyes going back to Wych Hazel. The girl shook her head.

'I never loved anybody, then. Unless mamma,' she answered.

'Lady, do ye know those words in your Bible—"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty?" Giving up yourself to God will put ye just there! And then—"He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust."'

It is one thing to hear these words sonorously read in church, or to run one's eye over them in a perfunctory manner. To see Gyda speak them, with the accent and air of one undeniably proving the truth of them, that was another thing.

'There may be yet a difficulty, Gyda,' said Rollo.

'What is't?'

'One may not know just how to get there, even after you have shewed the way.'

Rollo was not speaking lightly; but Gyda as she went back to her seat only answered,

'Ye can always ask.'

'Whom would you bid me ask, Gyda? I would about as lieve come to you as anybody, if I wanted counsel.'

'Give yourself to God, lad, and ye'll know there's but One to ask of. And there's but One before that, if ye want real help.'

There was a minute's pause; and then Rollo asked what Gyda had for him to do. 'Not yet,' she answered; and with that left the room. Rollo brought his chair to Wych Hazel's side.

'She is going to get you some supper,' he said, with a smile.

'No, it will be all for you,—and you will give me part of it. I should think you would come here very often, Mr. Rollo.'

'Do you?' said he, looking pleased. 'That shews I did right to bring you here. Now you'll have a Norse supper—the first you ever had. Gyda is Norse herself, I told you; she is a Tellemarken woman. If we were in Norway now, there would be in the further end of this room two huge cribs, which would be the sleeping place for the whole family. Overhead would be fishing nets hanging from the rafters, and a rack with a dozen or more rifles and fowling-pieces. On the walls you would see collars for reindeer, powder-horns and daggers. Gyda's spinning-wheel *is* here, you see; and her stove, besides the fireplace for cooking. Her dairy is a separate building, after Norway fashion, and so is her summer kitchen, where I know she is this minute, making porridge. Can you eat porridge?'

'Truly I cannot say, Mr. Rollo. But I do not often "thwart" *myself*—as you may have observed. Does the absence of Norse blood make the fact doubtful?'

'Norse habit, say rather,' said Rollo, shaking his head; 'Norse habit, induced by Norse necessity. In many a Norwegian homestead you would get little besides porridge, often. But Gyda likes it, and so do I. At any rate, it is invariable for a Norse meal, in this house. It is one of the things which can be transplanted. Gyda would have enjoyed a row of reindeer's horns bristling along the eaves of her cottage; but I told her the boys of the Hollow would not leave them long if I set them there.'

'But you are half Danish,' said Wych Hazel. 'And was it for love of Denmark that you got your name?'

'Which name? If you please?'

'You know,' said Wych Hazel, with a shy blush, as if it were a sort of freedom for her to know and speak it, 'they call you, "Dané Rollo."'

'That's not my name, though,' said he, smiling. 'I am no further a Dane than being born in Copenhagen makes me so. I am half Norse, and a quarter German; Denmark has given me a nickname,—that's all.'

'Then, if we were in Norway and this a considerable farmhouse, we should have passed through an ante-room filled with all sorts of things. Meal chests, and tools, and thongs of leather, skins of animals and wild birds, snow shoes and casks and little sledges. Do you know,' he went on, 'if this were not the land of my father, I could find it in my heart to go and live in the land of my mother. It is a noble land, and it is a fine people. Feudal law never obtained footing there; every land-holder held under no superior; and so there is a manly, genial independence in all the country-side, not found everywhere else.'

He went on for some little time to give Wych Hazel pictures of the scenery, unlike all she had ever known. He knew and loved it well, and his sketches were given graphically. In the midst of this Gyda came in again; and Rollo broke off, and asked her, laughingly, if she had any 'fladbrod.'

'Fresh,' she said. 'Olaf, can't you get her some peaches?'

Rollo went off; and the old woman began to set her table with bowls and plates and spoons; an oddly carved little tub of butter, and a pile of thin brown cakes. Hav-

ing done this, and Rollo not returning, on the contrary seeming to have found more than peach trees to detain him, for the sound of a hammer was heard at intervals, the old woman came and stood by Wych Hazel again. The straw hat was off; and she eyed in a tender kind of way, wistful too, the fair young face.

'Dear,' she said, in that same wistful way, laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, 'does he love you?'

Hazel started in extreme surprise; looking up with wide-open eyes; and more pale than red in her first astonishment.

'He? me?—No!' she said, as the blood came surging back. But then recollections came too, and possibilities—and eyes and head both drooped. And with the inevitable instinct of truth the girl added, under her breath—

'Perhaps—how do I know? I cannot tell!'

By that time head and hands too were on the back of her chair, and she had turned from Gyda, and her face was out of sight. With a tender little smile, which she could not see, the old Norse woman stood beside her, and with tender fingers which she did feel, smoothed and stroked the hair on each side of her head. For a few minutes.

'And, dear,' she said presently, in the same soft way, 'do you love him?'

There are questions, confusing enough when merely propounded by ourselves, in the solitude of our hearts; but which when coming first from the lips of another, before they have been fairly recognized as questions, become simply unbearable. Hazel shrank away from the words, gentle as they were, with one of her quick gestures.

'I do not know,' she cried. 'I have never thought! I have no business to know!'

And lifting her head for a moment, with eyes all grave and troubled and almost tearful, she looked into the face of the old Norwegian, mutely beseeching her to be merciful, and not push her advantage any further.

'I know!' said Gyda, softly. 'But it's only me.' And as if recognizing a bond which Wych Hazel did not, she lifted one little white hand in her two brown ones and kissed it.

'Everybody shews me their hearts,' she went on; 'but it's all here,' touching her breast, and meaning probably that it went no further. 'May I love my lad's lady a little bit?'

A strangely humble, wistful, sweet look she bent on Hazel as she spoke; to which the girl herself, too dumbfounded and shaken off her feet to quite know where she was, could find no better answer than a full rush of bright drops to her eyes, coming she knew not whence; and then a deep suffusion of throat and cheeks and brow, that was much better recognized and said it meant to stay. Her head went down again.

'Now it's only me,' said the old woman, quietly again. But Rollo's voice was heard from somewhere speaking her name, and she hurried out. There was a little interval, and then she came back bearing dishes to set on the table. Back and forth she went several times, and very likely had found more things to take up Rollo's attention; for he came not until she had her board all ready and summoned him. It was a well spread board when all was done. Shallow dishes of porridge, piles of fladbrod, bowls of cream, peaches, and coffee. And when Gyda

with due care had made a cup for Wych Hazel and brought it to her hand, the little lady was obliged to confess that it was better than even Chickaree manufacture. And the porridge was no brown farinaceous mass in a rough and crude state, but came to table in thin, gelatinous cakes, sweet and excellent when broken into the cream. But if Miss Wych had been afterwards put in the witness-box to tell what she had been eating, I think she would have refused to be sworn. The sheer necessity of the case had made her hold up her head—cool her cheeks she could not; but she took what was given her, and talked of it and praised it almost as steadily as if she had known what it was. Only, as extreme timidity is with some people an unnerving thing, there were moments when, do what she would, her lips must be screened behind the cup, and words that she said which were almost hoarse from the extreme difficulty with which they were spoken. As for a laugh, she tried it once.

She was served and tended with, it is hard to say whether most care or most pleasure, by both her companions. Midway of the meal came a help to her shyness.

The door slowly opened and a girl stepped in. She might have been fourteen or fifteen; she was tall enough for that; but the little figure was like a rail. So slight, so thin, so little relieved by any sufficiency of drapery in her poor costume. But the face was above all thin, pale, worn; with eyes that looked large and glassy from want and weariness. She came in, but then stood still, looking at the party where she had expected to find only the old Norwegian woman.

'Who is this?' said Rollo to Gyda.

'It is Trüdchen, of the Hollow. What is wanting, my child?' said Gyda.

'Come seeking medicine for the mind or body?' said Rollo. But after a second glance he rose up, went to the girl and offered her a chair. She looked at him without seeming to know his meaning.

'Speak Deutsch, Olaf,' said Gyda, 'and ye'll get better hearing. She can't speak yon.'

A few words in German made a change. The wan face waked up a little and looked astonished at the speaker. Rollo seated her; then poured out himself a cup of Gyda's coffee, creamed and sugared it duly, and offered it to the girl with the observance he would have given to a lady. Then he moved her chair nearer to the table, and supplied porridge and then peaches; talking and talking to her all the while. The answers began to come at last; the girl's colour changed with the coffee and her eyes brightened with every spoonful of the cream and porridge; and at last came a smile—what was it like?—like the wintriest gleam of a cold sky upon a cold world. Rollo got better than that, however, before he was done.

He had come back to Wych Hazel and left the girl to finish her supper in peace; when suddenly his attention was attracted by some question addressed by the latter to Gyda. He looked up and himself answered. The girl started from her seat with a degree of animation she had given no symptom of till then, said a few words very eagerly and hurriedly, and darted from the door like a sprite.

'What now?' said Hazel, looking after the girl. 'What has Mr. Rollo done?'

'Cut short somebody's supper, I'm afraid. But she

finished her porridge, didn't she? And has taken one peach with her! Do they all look like that, Gyda?'

Gyda answered that they were 'very bad;' she meant in their way of life and their thriving on it.

'And how otherwise?'

There seemed to be not much to say 'otherwise.' They were very good to her, Gyda remarked. Wych Hazel listened, but she risked no more questions. The supper lingered a while longer; Gyda and Rollo talking of various things and drawing in Wych Hazel when they could; then Gyda fetched a book and opened it and laid before Rollo. He left the table and came to Wych Hazel's side.

'Gyda always, when she can, has prayers with her visitors,' he said, 'and she makes them read for her. She, and I, would like it if you would do the reading to-night. Will you?'

How easily she started to-night!—Hazel answered without looking up—

'She would rather have you.'

'No, she wouldn't. Excuse me! She asked me to ask you.'

The girl had not found her feet yet, nor got clear of her bewilderment. And so, before she more than half knew what she was about she had taken the book and was reading—absolutely reading aloud to those two!—the ninety-first Psalm. Aloud, it was; but only because the voice was so wonderfully clear and sweet-toned could they have heard a word. As it was, neither listener lost one.

They knelt then, and Gyda uttered a prayer sweet enough to follow the Psalm. A little louder than Wych Hazel's low key, but no less quiet in tone. It was not

long; she took those two, as it were, in the arms of her love, and presented them as candidates for all the blessings of the Psalm; making her plea for the two, somehow, a compound and homogeneous one.

The sun was down: it was time to get to horse—for the riders. Gyda's farewells were very affectionate in feeling, though also very quiet in manner.

'Will you come to see me again?' she asked of Wych Hazel, while Rollo was gone out to see to the horses.

'Will you let me? I should like to come.'

'Then you'll come,' said Gyda. She had shaken hands with Rollo before. But now when he came in for Wych Hazel he went up to where Gyda was standing, bent down and kissed her.

'Miss Kennedy, have you said "Tak för maden?"'

'I? No. How should I?' said Wych Hazel; 'is it a spell?'

'Come here,' said he, laughing. 'You must shake hands with Gyda and say, "Tak för maden;" that is, "Thanks for the meat." That is Norwegian good manners, and you are in a Norwegian house. Come and say it.'

She came shyly, trying to laugh too, and again held out her hand; stammering a little over the unaccustomed syllables, but rather because they were prescribed than because they were difficult. Certainly if there was a spell in the air that night Wych Hazel thought it had got hold of her.

'That's proper,' said Rollo, 'and now we'll go. It ought to have been said when we rose from table; but better late than never. That's your first lesson in Norse.'

Rollo had been in a sort of quiet, gay mood all the

afternoon. Out of the house and in the saddle this mood seemed to be exchanged for a different one. He was silent, attending to his business with only a word here and there, alert and grave. The words to the ear, however, were free and pleasant as ever. At the bottom of the hill, in the meadow, he came close to Wych Hazel's side.

'Don't canter here,' said he. 'Trot. Not very fast, for the people are out from their work now, many of them. But we'll go as fast as we can.'

'Fast as you like,' she answered. 'I will follow your pace.'

'No,' said he, smiling; 'we might run over somebody.'

The people were out from their work, and many of them stood in groups and parties along the sides of the street. It was an irregular roadway, with here a mill and there a mill, on one side and on the other, and cottages scattered all along between and behind. It had been an empty way when they came; it was populous now. Men and women were there, sometimes in separate groups; and a fringe of children, boys and girls, on both sides of the road. The general mill population seemed to be abroad. They appeared to be doing nothing, all standing gazing at the riders. The light was fading now, and the wretchedness of their looks was not so plainly to be seen in detail; and yet, somehow, the aggregate effect was quite in keeping with that of Trüdchen's appearance alone at the house above.

Through this scattering of humanity the riders went at a gentle, even trot; the horses pacing almost in step, the stirrups as near together as they could be. As they came to the thickest of this crowd of spectators, Rollo

courteously raised his hat to them. There was at first no answer, then a murmur, then two or three old hats were waved in the air. Again Rollo saluted them, and in two minutes more the mills were passed. The road lay empty and quiet between the high banks, on which the soft twilight was beginning to settle down.

'I like that,' said Wych Hazel, impulsively, forgetting her shyness—she, too, had bowed as they rode by. 'Mr. Rollo, is it a secret, what you said to that child? It looks to me as if she had brought the people out to look at you.'

'Will you ride?' said he. 'Let us have a canter first.'

It was a pretty swift canter, and the two had flown over a good deal of ground before Rollo drew bridle again on coming out into the main road.

'Now,' he said, 'we can talk. There is no secret about anything. The girl asked, at Gyda's, how soon we were going away? I answered, in half an hour. Whereupon she begged very urgently that we would delay and not get to the mills till *she* had been there; and darted away as you saw.'

'Impressive power of peaches!' said Hazel, with a laugh. 'Commend my penetration. I wish all our waste baskets of fruit could be emptied out in that Hollow, and so be of some use. It would be fun to send Mr. Morton's own grapes'—but there she stopped.

'I am afraid you are mistaken,' said Rollo, gravely. 'The manner and accent of the girl made me apprehend danger of some annoyance—which I think she went to prevent. The road being a *cul de sac*, she knew, and they knew, we must come back that way. Gyda will find out all about it; but she said it meant mischief.'

'Mischief? To us?'

'Yes. They are very degraded, and I suppose embittered, by their way of life; and do not like to see people taking their pleasure as we are doing.'

'*That* was what they were out for! Mr. Falkirk may well say my eyes are ignorant,' said the girl, thoughtfully. 'But Mr. Rollo—is this the only way to—— What do ordinary people call your friend?'

'Gyda? The name is Boërresen—contracted by vulgar usage to Borsen.'

'Well, is this the only way you can get to her cottage?'

'The only way; except by a scramble over the hills and fields where no way is. I fancy you are mistaken again, however, in your conclusions from what you have seen this evening. I do not think they were out to do us mischief. Their attitude did not strike me as like that. I think Trüdchen had been beforehand with them.'

'And does Mrs. Boërresen like to have you come and go through the Hollow, knowing the people?'

'I never heard of the least annoyance to any one there before. I can only surmise that the sight of a lady, where no lady ever comes, excited the spite of some children perhaps. And they might have expressed their spite by throwing a few stones. *That* I half expected.'

'What would you have done then?' said Wych Hazel, with sudden curiosity.

'Dodge the stones, of course!' Rollo answered quietly.

Hazel gleamed up at him from under her hat, her lips in a curl.

'That is only what you would have *tried* to do,' she

said. But then Miss Wych subsided and fell back into the closest rapt attention to the beauties of the landscape and the evening sky.

'The only time,' Rollo went on, 'when the least annoyance would be possible, is after work hours, or just at noon when they are out for dinner. At all other times the whole population is shut up in the mills, and the street is empty.'

'Was it your peaches then after all?' said the girl suddenly. 'Or did she pray us through?'

Rollo gave her one of the bright, sweet smiles he sometimes gave to his old nurse.

'How do I know?' he said. 'I think—peaches were sweet. And I don't believe Gyda ever prays in vain.'

Of course, such an afternoon, everybody had been out; happily the hour was so late that few were left on the road; but Wych could not escape all encounters.

'Your days are numbered, Dane Rollo!' called out Mr. Kingsland as he went by. 'Coffee and pistols at four to-morrow morning!—And if my shot fails, there are ten more to follow. The strong probability is that Miss Kennedy beholds us both for the last time!' Which melancholy statement was honoured with a soft irrepressible laugh that it was a pity Mr. Kingsland would not wait to hear.

Then before Wych Hazel had brought her face into order, a sharp racking trot came down a cross-road, and Kitty Fisher reined up at her side.

'I vow!' she said,—'you look jolly here! The Viking must have been exerting himself. So! you are the girl that never flirts!'

'What of it?' said Wych Hazel, with cool gravity.

'O nothing,—nothing in the world!' said Miss Fisher.

'I've come to get a lesson, that's all. For real instruction in the art, commend me to your cream-faced people who never do it.'

'Nobody ever saw cream the colour of *my* face,' said Wych Hazel good-humouredly. 'It is yours, Kitty, that always deserves the comparison.'

Here Rollo, who had been sheering about for a minute on his springy bay, suddenly came up between the two girls and kept the brown mare too far to the left to permit another flank movement to out-general him.

'I should like somebody to explain to me,' he said, addressing Kitty, 'what flirting is. I have never been able to come to a clear understanding of what is meant by the term.'

'Very likely,' said Kitty, 'seeing it's a muddled-up thing. Never did it yourself, I suppose?'

'That depends upon what "it" is,' insisted Rollo.

'Does it?' said Kitty. 'Well, if ever you try it with me, you'll burn your fingers and find out.'

Again in spite of everything Wych Hazel laughed,—ever so softly, but undeniably.

'Tell me what it is,—and I will promise never to try it with you.' Kitty's handsome face darkened.

'Can you reason back from particular cases to general principles?' she said.

'You always want a great many cases to form an induction,' said Rollo, 'I thought you would shirk the question.'

'Shirk? not I,' said Miss Fisher. 'I was just going to give you an instance. That girl, who has played coy all summer, and wouldn't ride with a man here because she must have her own horse, forsooth; suddenly

waives her scruples in favour of another man, and finds she can ride *his* horse, without difficulty.'

Wych Hazel drew up her graceful figure to its full height, but she said not a word. Riding at ease, as usual, Rollo spoke in a voice as clear as it was cold.

'Only a coward, Miss Fisher, strikes a man—or a woman—whose hands are bound. Good evening.'

Lifting his hat with his most curt salutation, Rollo seized the bridle of the brown mare and made her understand what was expected of her, his own bay at the instant springing forward with a bound. Miss Kitty was left in the distance. Neither was she mounted well enough to follow if she had had the inclination. The run this time was in good earnest, till they drew rein again near the gate of Chickaree.

'I knew I could trust you to keep your seat,' said Rollo then lightly to his companion, 'even if I was unceremonious.'

'And I—' That sentence was never finished. This last run had rather shaken the colour out of her cheeks than into them. But Hazel had a good deal of real bravery about her; and in a minute more she turned again to her companion.

'Thank you, Mr. Rollo,' she said, gravely. 'I think you are a true knight.'

'You might as well talk reason to Vixen as to Kitty Fisher,' muttered Rollo. But in another minute he changed his tone.

'Are you tired?'

'I hardly know. Which should prove that I am not.

'I am afraid it don't prove that at all.'

He was silent till they came to the door where they had mounted in the afternoon. Dismounting then, and com-

ing to Wych Hazel's side to do the same service for her, Mr. Rollo lingered a little about the preliminaries; as if he liked them.

'Mrs. Bywank tells me,' he said, 'that you have been eager all summer for the riding you could not have. You must forgive her,—she cannot help talking of you. Will you do me the honour to let Jeannie Deans stand in your stable for the present, and ride her with whomsoever you please to honour in that way.'

There was a little inarticulate cry of joy at that,—then timidly,

'But, Mr. Rollo——'

'Well?' said he, softly.

'You might want her. And—if I rode with other people, they might take me where you would not like her to go. Will you let me ride her sometimes just by myself?' she said, glancing at him and instantly away again.

'That is for your pleasure to say,' he returned lightly, lifting her down. And then, detaining her slightly for just half a second, he added, laughing,

'Please don't take Jeannie anywhere that I would not like her to go!'

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WILL.

THAT night, and the next morning, Miss Kennedy had a fight with herself, trying hard to regain her footing, which was constantly swept away again by some new incoming tide of thoughts. It looks an easy matter enough, to climb out once more upon the ice through which you have broken; but when piece after piece comes off in your hands, sousing you deeper down than before, the thing begins to look serious. And in this case the young lady began to get impatient.

'Such unmitigated nonsense!' she declared to herself, with her cheeks on fire. But nevertheless said nonsense lifted its head very cleverly from under all the negations she could pile upon it; and indeed looked rather refreshed than otherwise by the operation. How Mr. Falkirk had dimly hinted at such things, long ago,—and how she had laughed at them! Was *this* what he had suggested her confiding to him?—Whereupon Miss Kennedy brought herself up short.

'I should like to know what I have to confide!' she said. 'I hope I am not quite a fool.' And with that she beat a retreat, and rushed down-stairs, and gave Mr. Falkirk an extravaganza of extra length and brilliancy for his breakfast; which, however, it may be noted, did not include any particulars of her ride. But when breakfast was over, Miss Kennedy for a moment descend ed to business.

'By the way, sir, I should tell you, Mr. Rollo proposes to leave one of his horses here, for me to use till my own come,—if that extraordinary day ever arrives. Are you agreeable—or otherwise—Mr. Falkirk?'

'I have never made any professions of being agreeable, Miss Hazel; and it never was charged to me, that I know.'

'No, sir, certainly,—not when rides are in question. But may I use this horse, which has the misfortune to belong to somebody else?'

'I suppose he wouldn't give it to you if it was not fit for you to use,' said Mr. Falkirk, rather growlingly it must be confessed. 'Does he expect you to ride it with anybody but him, my dear?'

'As he made no mention of expecting me to ride with him, sir, the question presents itself somewhat differently to my mind,' said Miss Kennedy, with some heightening of colour. It had not been a 'pale' morning, altogether. 'Having a horse, Mr. Falkirk, may I ride with whom I like?'

'If the giver of the horse has no objections, Miss Hazel, I make none.'

'I am afraid, sir, your long seclusion has slightly unsettled your mind,' said Wych Hazel, looking at him with grave consideration, 'There is no "giver" of the horse in the first place; and in the second, you know perfectly well that with his first "objection" to my escorts, the horse would go back. And you used to be so exact, Mr. Falkirk!' she added, in a melancholy tone.

'Yes, my dear,' said her guardian, passing his hand over his face; 'no doubt my mind is in the condition you suggest. I am probably enchanted; which does not help me to guard you from falling into the same awk-

ward condition. But, Miss Hazel, I have engaged a new groom for you. I desire that you will take him with you instead of Dingee. Dingee is no more than a monkey.'

It fell out, however, that Miss Kennedy in the next few days refused several 'escorts,' on her own responsibility; saying nothing about Jeannie Deans. Instead whereof, she went off in the early morning hours and had delightful long trots by herself, with only the new groom; who, she did not happen to remark, developed a remarkable familiarity with the new horse. Threading her way among the beautiful woods of Chickaree, wherever a bridle-path offered, and sure to be at home long before Mr. Falkirk's arrival to breakfast, so that he knew nothing whatever about the matter. Just why this course of action was in favour, perhaps the young lady herself could scarcely have told, had she tried; but she did not try. Whether other associations would break the harmony of some already well established; whether she feared people's questions about her horse; whether she liked the wild, irregular roaming through the forest

'ith no one nigh to hender'—

as Lowell has it. This last was undeniably true.

Meantime Mr. Rollo himself was away again—gone for a few days at first, and then by business kept on and on; and it suddenly flashed into Wych Hazel's mind one day, that now, before he got home, was the very time to go and have a good long talk with Primrose and her father. Nobody there to come in even at dinner time but Dr. Authur; and him Wych Hazel liked so much and minded so little, that Dr. Arthur was in some danger of minding it a good deal. She would go early and

ride Jeannie Deans, and get home before the crowd of loungers got out for their afternoon's play. At most it was but a little way from Dr. Maryland's to the edge of her own woods; not more than three miles perhaps; four to the gate.

Primrose was overjoyed to see her.

'What does make your visits so few and far between?' she cried as her hand came to lift off Wych Hazel's hat.

'Well,—what does make yours?' said Hazel, gaily. 'I am come for a little talk with you, and a lecture from Dr. Maryland, and any other nice thing I can find.'

'Then we shall keep you to dinner, and I'll have your horse put up. I do not see so much of you, Hazel, as I hoped I should when you came. You are such a gay lady.'

It was difficult to deny this. However, the talk ran on to other pleasanter topics, and was enjoyed by both parties for about half an hour. Then came a hindrance in the shape of a lady wearing the very face that had bowed to Wych Hazel so impressively from the carriage in Morton Hollow. The very same! the long pale features, the bandeaux of lustreless pale hair enclosing them, and two of those lustreless eyes which look as if they had not depth enough to be blue; eyes which give, and often appropriately, the feeling of shallowness in the character. But now and then a shallow lake of water has a pit of awful depth somewhere.

Prim's face did not welcome the interruption.

'This is my sister, Prudentia—Mrs. Coles,' she said. 'It is Miss Kennedy, Prudentia.'

A most gracious, not to say ingratiating, bend and smile of Mrs. Coles answered this. She was a tall, thin

figure, dressed in black. It threw out the pale face and flaxen bandeaux and light grey eyes into the more relief.

'I am delighted to see Miss Kennedy,' she said. 'It is quite a hoped-for pleasure. But I have seen her before—just seen her.'

Wych Hazel bowed—remembering with some amusement Mr. Rollo's caracole on the former occasion all about Mrs. Coles. Privately she wished she had not promised to stay to dinner.

'I was frightened to death at your riding'—the lady went on. 'Did your horse start at anything?'

'My horse starts very often when I am on him,' said Wych Hazel laughing.

'Does he! And do you think that is quite safe?'

'Why not?—if I start too. The chief danger in such cases is in being left behind.'

Wych Hazel was getting her witch mood on fast. Mrs. Coles looked a trifle puzzled.

'But my dear!' she said, 'the danger of *that*, I should think, would be if the other horse started.'

'O no, ma'am,' said Hazel gravely. 'My escorts never even so much as think of running away from me.'

At that point Primrose's gravity gave way, and she burst into a laugh. Mrs. Coles changed the subject.

'I have been very impatient to see one I have heard so much of,' she began again. 'In fact I have heard of you always. I should have called at Chickaree, but I couldn't get any one to take me. Arthur, he was busy—and Dr. Maryland never goes anywhere but to visit his people—Prim goes everywhere, but it is not where I want to go, for pleasure; and Dane I asked, and he wouldn't.'

'He did not say he wouldn't, Prudentia,' remarked her sister.

'He didn't say he would,' returned Mrs. Coles, with a peculiar laugh; 'and I knew what that meant. O, I should have got there some time. I will yet.'

Miss Kennedy bowed—she believed the fault must be hers. But she had not quite understood—or had confused things—in her press of engagements.

Mrs. Coles graciously assumed that there had been no failure in that quarter. And Dr. Maryland came in, and the dinner. A nice little square party they were, for Dr. Arthur was not at home; and yet somehow the conversation flowed in more barren channels than was ever the wont at that table in Wych Hazel's experience. A great deal of talk was about what people were doing; a little about what they were wearing; an enormous amount about what they were saying. Part of this seemed to be religious talk too, and yet what was the matter with it? Or was it with Wych Hazel that something was the matter? Primrose and Dr. Maryland then shared the trouble, for whatever they said was in attempted diversion or correction or emendation. Certainly among them all the talk did not languish.

There came a pause for a short space after dinner, when Dr. Maryland had gone back to his study. Then there was a demand for Primrose; one of her Sunday school children wanted her. Wych Hazel and Mrs. Coles were left alone. Mrs. Coles changed her seat for one nearer the young lady.

'I have been really anxious to see you, my dear Miss Kennedy,' she began, benignly.

'Some one of my escapades has reached her ears!' thought the young lady to herself; 'now if I can give

her a good, harmless, mental shock,—just to bear it out! — I certainly will.—That sounds very kind,' she said aloud.

'Yes,—you know I heard so much about you when you were a child, and your connection with this house, and all;—and your whole romantic story; and now when I learned that you were grown up and here again I really wanted to see you and see how you looked. I must, you know,' she added, with her peculiar smile.

There was so much in these words that was incomprehensible, that Wych Hazel for the moment was at a loss for any answer at all; and waited for what would come next, with eyes rather larger than usual. Mrs. Coles went on, scanning her carefully as she spoke, that same smile, half flattering, half assuming, wreathing her lips.

'I did want very much to see you—I was curious, and I am. Do tell me—how does it feel to have two guardians? I should think, you know, that one would be enough for comfort; and the other is sure to be a jealous guardian. Perhaps you don't mind it,' added Mrs. Cole, with a face so amiable, that if Wych Hazel had been a cat it would have certainly provoked a spring.

The first thing that struck the girl in this speech, was a certain sinister something, which by sheer instinct of self-defence threw her into position at once. The outward expression of it this time, seemed to be just one of the poor jokes about Mr. Rollo. 'Have you two guardians?' Mr. Nightingale had said.

'O sometimes I mind one, and sometimes I do not!' she answered, with a laugh.

'Ah, but *which* one do you mind?' said Mrs. Coles shrewdly. 'Or do they both pull together? To be sure,

that is to be hoped, for your sake. It is a very peculiar position! And, I should think, trying. It would be to me.'

'People say there are a good many trying situations in life,' said Wych Hazel meekly, watching her antagonist. Why did the lady seem to her such?

'Yes!' said Mrs. Coles with half a sigh. 'And to be young and rich and gifted with beauty and loaded with admiration, isn't the worst; if it *is* trying to enjoy it all between two guardians. Do they keep you very close, my dear?'

('I think she is a little crazy,' thought the girl. 'No wonder—with such eyes.'—) 'A dozen could hardly do that, ma'am, thank you. Makes a more difficult fence to leap, of course—but when you are used to the exercise—'

Mrs. Coles laughed, a thin peculiar sort of laugh, not enjoyable to the hearer, though seeming to be enjoyed by the person from whom it proceeded. She had the air of being amused.

'Well,' she said, 'I should like to see you leap over fences of Dane's making. He used to do that for mine sometimes; it would serve him right. Does he know you do it?'

Unmistakeably, by degrees, Hazel felt her pulses quickening. There was more in this than mere banter; it was too connected and full of purpose for insanity; What was it? what dread was softly creeping towards her; and she could hear only a breaking twig or a rustling leaf? She must be very wary!

'I have been riding in other directions,' she answered carelessly. 'And not leaping much at all.'

The laugh just appeared again.

'Of course I do not know, but I fancy, his fences would not be easy to get over; Dane's, I mean. He was a very difficult boy to manage. Indeed I cannot say that I ever did manage him. He would have his own way, and my father always would take sides with him. So everybody. So Primrose. O, Prim won't hear me say a word against him. And I am not saying a word against him; only I was very curious to know how he would fill his new office, and how well you would like it, and how it would all work. It is quite a romance, really.'

'And it is quite easy to make out a romance where none exists,' said Miss Kennedy, in a frigid tone.

'My dear! you wouldn't say that your case is not a romance?' said Mrs. Coles. 'I never knew one equal to it, out of books; and in them one always thinks the situation is made up. And to be sure, so is this; only Mr. Kennedy and Dane's father made it up between them. Don't you call your case a romance?'

'What part of my own case?' said the girl defiantly. If people had come to this, it was high time to stop them. 'Perhaps if you will be kind enough to speak more in detail, I may be able to put you right on several points.'

'My dear!' said Mrs. Coles, again with a surprised and protecting air, through which the amusement nevertheless shone. 'Don't you call the terms of the will romantic?'

'What will? and what terms?'—The defiance was in her eyes now. 'I cannot correct details if you keep to generals.'

'Your father's will, my dear; your father's and mother's I should say, for she added her signature and

confirmation. And I'm sure *that* was one remarkable thing. It is so uncertain how boys will grow up.'

'And the romance?' said Wych Hazel. 'Will you tell me what version of it you have heard?'

'Why, my dear, you know Dane is your guardian, don't you?'

The girl's heart gave a bound—but that could wait; just now there was other business on hand.

'Well,' she said, 'is that the opening chapter? What comes next? I cannot review in part.'

'But didn't you know that, my dear? Did they keep it from you?'

Wych Hazel laughed,—Mrs. Coles was too much a stranger to her to know how,—and took out her watch. 'I must go in ten minutes,' she said,—'and I do want to hear this "romance," first. One's private affairs get such fresh little touches from strange hands! Just see what a heading for your next chapter, Mrs. Coles,—"*N.B.* The heroine did not know herself." Will it take you more than ten minutes?' she added, persuasively.

'If you didn't know, Primrose will be very angry with me,' said the lady, not seeming terrified, by the way,—'and Dane will be fit to take my head off. I had better go away before he comes.'

'Why, he is not your guardian too, is he?' said the girl, mockingly. 'That would prove him a man of more unbounded resources than even I had reason to suppose.'

'No,' said Prudentia, 'it was the other way. I was his once, practically. Not legally of course. That was my father. But do tell me—*have* I done something dreadful in telling you this?'

'I'll tell you things when you have told me,' said Wych Hazel. 'No cross-examination can go on from both sides at once. But I have only nine minutes now, so your part of the fun, Mrs. Coles, will be cut short, I foresee.'—Certainly Mrs. Coles might well be puzzled. But Wych Hazel had met with her match.

'My dear,' the lady returned, 'what do you want me to say? If you know about the will—that is what I was thinking of, I don't want to say anything I should not say. I didn't know but you knew.'

'And I didn't know but you *didn't* know,' said Miss Kennedy, feeling as nearly wild as anybody well could. 'If you do not, and I do, it is just as well, I daresay.' And she rose up and crossed the room to an open window from which she could speak to her groom, Lewis, in the distance, ordering up her horse. Mrs. Coles had a good view of her as she went and returned, steady, erect, and swift.

'My Dear,' said the lady with that same little laugh, 'I know all about it, and did twelve years ago. You have nothing to tell me—except how the plan works. About that, I confess, I was curious.'

'O I shall not tell you that, Mrs. Coles, unless I hear exactly what you suppose the plan to be. Exactness is very important in such cases. And, by-the-by, you must be the lady of whom Mr. Rollo has spoken to me several times,' said Wych Hazel, with a sudden look.

'Has he? What did he say?'

'Several things. But my horse is coming. Do you think Mr. Rollo would really object to our discussing the "romance" together?'

Was it cunning or instinct in Wych Hazel? Mrs. Coles answered with a significant chuckle, but added

—'My dear, you know he has money enough of his own.'

'Has he?' said Hazel, seeming to feel the lava crack under her feet, and expecting every moment a hot sulphur bath.

'So of course he is not to be supposed to want any more. Didn't you know he was rich?'

'Never thought about it, if I did.'

'No, I suppose not. But if you never thought about it, nor about him,—I declare! it *is* hard that he should have the disposal of you and all you've got. Rich! his father was rich, and his money has been growing and growing all these years. I daresay he'll not be a bad master,—but yet, it's rather a hard case, *if* you never thought of him.'

Wych Hazel was silent a moment, as if thinking.

'What was the exact wording of the will, Mrs. Coles? Do you remember?'

'Wording? I don't know about wording, the lawyers curl their words round so, and plait them together; but the sense I know well enough; the terms of the will. It made a great impression upon me; and then seeing Dane for so many years, and knowing all about it, I couldn't forget it. This was the way of it. You know your father, and your mother, and Dane's father were immense friends?'

She paused, but Wych Hazel gave her no help.

'So they struck up this plan between them, when Mr. Kennedy knew he was ill and wouldn't ever be well again, and that his wife would not long outlive him. You were put under that old gentleman's guardianship,—I forget his name at this minute, but you know it well enough,—Mr. Falkirk! that was it. You

were to be under Mr. Falkirk's guardianship, and Dane was to be the ward of my father; and so it was, you know. But when he arrived at the age of twenty-five, upon making certain declarations formally, before the proper persons, Dane, the will appointed, should be joint guardian with Mr. Falkirk, and look after you himself.'

Mrs. Coles paused and surveyed her auditor; indeed she had been doing that all along. And perhaps people of her sort are moved from first to last by a feeling akin to that which possessed the old Roman world, when men were put to painful deaths at public and private shows to gratify a critical curiosity which observed how they conquered pain or succumbed under it. Mrs. Coles paused.

'But I haven't told you,' she went on with a look as sharp as a needle, 'I haven't told you yet the substance of the declaration Dane was to make, to enable him to take his position. He was to declare, that it was his wish and purpose to make you his wife. Upon that understanding, with the approbation of Mr. Falkirk and my father, the thing was all to be fixed, as I told you. Then you would be between two guardians. And if you, up to the age of twenty-five, married any one else, against their joint consent, your lands and properties were to pass away from you to him, except a certain provision settled upon you for life. And,' said Mrs. Coles, with another chuckle, 'I wanted to know how it feels.'

Had an arrow or a bullet gone through her? or was it only the hot iron burning in those words? Hazel did not know. The one coherent thought in the girl's mind, was that a dying standard-bearer will sometimes bring away his colours. She brought off hers.

'I see but two mistakes,' she said, forcing herself to speak slowly, clearly. 'But I daresay either Mr. Rollo or Mr. Falkirk can point them out, any time. I must go. Good afternoon.'

She was gone—Mrs. Coles hardly knew by which way. The next minute Dr. Maryland's study door that looked on the garden swung back, and Wych Hazel stood by his side. Outside were Lewis and Jeannie Deans. Her eyes were in a glitter,—the Doctor could see nothing else.

'Sir,' she said, laying her hand on his book in her eagerness,—'excuse me,—Is this story that Mrs. Coles tells, true?'

In utter astonishment, gentle, wondering, benignant, the Doctor looked up at her.

'Hazel? What is the matter? Sit down, my dear, if you want to speak to me.'

She moved a few steps off, as if afraid of being held. 'Is this true, Dr. Maryland, that she says about me—— and——Mr. Rollo?' The words half choked her, but she got them out. 'The will?—don't you know?—you must know! Is it true?'

'What are you talking of, Hazel? Sit down, my dear. Prudentia? What has she been talking to you about? I hope—'

'My father's will,—does she know?' Hazel repeated.

'Your father's will?—Prudentia?—Has she been talking to you of that! My dear, that was not necessary. It was not needful that you should hear anything about it; not now. I am sorry. Prudentia must have forgotten herself!' Dr. Maryland looked seriously disturbed.

'You do not tell me!' cried the girl. 'Dr. Maryland, is it true, what she says?'

'I do not know what she has said, my dear. But you need not be troubled about it. It was a kind will, and I think on the whole a wise one,—guarded on every side. What has Prudentia said to you, Hazel?' The Doctor spoke with grave authority now.

To which Miss Kennedy replied characteristically. She had caught up the words as he went on,—'not needful she should know,'—'she need not be troubled,'—then it was true! Everybody knew it except herself; everybody was doubtless also wondering how it felt! For a second she looked straight into her old friend's face, trying vainly to find a negative there, and then without a word she was off. And if Lewis had been called upon to bear witness, he might have said that his young mistress flew into the saddle, and then flew home.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHOSE WILL?

A GREAT new sorrow is a many-cornered thing; having its sharp points that sting, and its jagged points that wound; with others so dull and heavy and immoveable that one is ready to wish they could pierce through and make an end. And it is quite impossible to tell beforehand on which of them we may happen to strike first.

Wych Hazel tried them all on her way home; but when that last one came, it stayed; and through all the sharpness of the others—through anger and mortification and the keen sense of injury, and the fiery rebellion against control—the moveless weight upon her breast was worse than all. What was it? What laid it there? Not much to look at. A poor little plant, cut down and fallen—that was all. Nobody knew when it started, and no one could say that it would ever bloom: it had been doubtful and shy of its own existence, and she herself had never guessed it was there, till suddenly its fragrance was all around. And even now, wilted and under foot, it was sweeter than everything else; sweeter than even its own self had ever been before. Yes; of all the bitter truths she had heard that day, this that she said to herself was the one supreme: Gyda's words of expectation would never be made good.

'Never,' she repeated. 'Never, never!'—and it

seemed to Hazel that in all her lonely life she had never before known what it was to feel alone.

This then explained all his wonderful care of her,—of course; it was part of his legal duty. She should learn to hate him now, she knew. Very likely he found it amusing as well! It must be rather spicy work to a man loving power, to manage a wild girl and her estate together—and with that Miss Kennedy's resolution took a vehement turn. And *this* was why Mr. Falkirk had been so easy—and why—and why— At which point thoughts and breath got in an utter tangle, and she had to begin all over again.

He could not wait to be guardian till she gave him permission.—'Well for him!' said Miss Hazel, with a gesture of her head. And then if she married anybody else without his leave—and she would have to ask his leave!—Would she?—not quite, the girl thought to herself. Neither in great things nor in small would he be troubled *much* in that way. Very generous of him to declare his purpose—of—of— And here suddenly thoughts flew off to Gyda's soft-spoken title for her,—words that bore yet their freight of shame and pleasure, for Hazel's head went down. She brought herself back sharply.

Very nice of him to tell other people what he meant to do!—of course *her* purposes in that line were of small moment, if she had any. Things would run in this style now, she supposed: 'Thank you, Mr. May,—I will ask Mr. Falkirk; and if he approves I will ask Mr. Rollo —if I can find him, for he is generally away. And if *he* says yes, I can go.'

No visitors saw her that day;—and Mr. Falkirk had his breakfast alone, watched over by Mrs. Bywank. 'Miss Wych had a headache,'—which was extremely

likely, as she had cried all night. But after that the world of Chickaree went on as usual, to all outward appearance.

Some weeks had passed over since the ride to Morton Hollow, when one afternoon Rollo's bay again walked up to the side entrance of the Chickaree house. The few days of his intended absence had been lengthened out by the wearisome delays of business, so that that morning had seen the young gentleman but just home. In the course of a private interview with Dr. Maryland he had received some disagreeable information.

'By the way, Dane,' said Dr. Maryland reluctantly, 'I have bad news for you.'

'What is it, sir?'

'At least it is not good. How bad it may be I can't tell. Hazel has heard all about—what she shouldn't have heard!—the terms of the will and the whole story.'

A flash of very disagreeable surprise crossed the young man's face. He was silent.

'It seems Prudentia told her,' Dr. Maryland went on, uneasily. 'I don't understand how she could be so thoughtless; but so it is. Hazel was very much excited by what she heard.'

'Naturally! You saw her?'

'For a minute. She came to me to know if it was true; but she did not stay after that.'

No remark from the opposite party.

'I'm very sorry about it,' continued the old gentleman. 'I'm afraid—I *was* afraid, it might make you trouble, Dane. Prudentia is much to blame.'

Dane answered nothing. He wrung his late guardian's hand by way of acknowledging his sympathy, and left the study.

'I had almost caught my bird!' was his thought, pretty bitterly realized,—'and this woman has broken my snares. It isn't the first time!'

He saw, he thought he saw, the whole character and extent of the mischief that had been done. He knew Wych Hazel; he could guess at the bound of revulsion her spirit would make at several points in the narrative that had been told her. He knew Prudentia; he could fancy that the details lost nothing in the giving.

But the steadiness, not of feeling, but of nerves and judgment, which was characteristic of him, kept his eyesight clear even now. He did not fall into Wych Hazel's confusion of thoughts and notions; nor did his hunter's instincts fail him. His game was removed to a distance; *that* he saw; it might be a long distance,—and how much patient skill might be called for before it would be within his grasp again it was impossible to guess. There were odds of another hunter catching up the coveted quarry; other snares might be set, of a less legitimate nature; other weapons called into play than his own. There are some natures who do not know how to fail, and who never do fail in what they set themselves to accomplish. In spite of disadvantages, Rollo had very much in his favour; and this peculiar constitution of mind, among other things.

He would go up to Chickaree that same day. Before presenting himself there, he and the bay horse travelled, I am afraid to say how many miles in two hours. But nerves and senses were in their usual condition of excellent soundness, and his temper in its usual poise, when he turned in at the gate of Chickaree, and mounted the hill.

Before he quite reached the house, however, Mr.

Rollo, being quick of eye, caught a signal from among the trees down towards the garden: a woman's hand raised in the fashion of a Sunday school scholar asking leave to speak. Drawing bridle, to make sure that he saw right, or to find what this strange sign might mean, he presently saw little Phœbe of the mill, who, leaving her basket of muslins on the grass, now came running towards him. Phœbe's regard for Mr. Rollo, it may be said, was second only to her devotion to her mistress.

'I hope I'm not taking too much of a liberty, sir,' she began, all out of breath with eagerness and running, 'but I said to myself maybe Mr. Rollo would know what to do. For I'm sure Miss Hazel must be very sick,—and nobody takes a bit of notice.'

The inner pang with which this advice was received did not at all appear. Rider and horse were motionless, and the answer was a grave—

'Why do you think so, Phœbe?'

'May I tell you all about it, sir?' said the girl, earnestly. Then without waiting for permission—'I never have told a living soul, Mr. Rollo; for Mrs. Bywank she shuts me up with: "Do your work Phœbe, and don't talk;" and so I have, sir, always. It was one day after a ride—for she's had the beautifullest horse, sir!—since you've been away, I guess; and she'd ride every morning before breakfast, and come home looking—Well I can't begin to tell!' said Phœbe, enthusiastically. 'But Reo said it was the flush of the morning going through his gate.'

The bay lifted up one foot and struck it impatiently on the ground. His rider sat still, waiting upon Phœbe's words. The reins were on the horse's neck, but the creature probably had made up his mind that any volun-

teei extra steps were unnecessary under his new master; for he stood like a rock, that one foot excepted.

'So,' said Phœbe, taking up her broken thread, 'of course Jeannie Deans (that's the horse, Mr. Rollo) began to love her, might and main, right off—as everybody does; but even Mr. Lewis allowed he never saw a horse learn so quick. And it isn't often he allows anything,' said Phœbe, with the slightest toss of her head. 'It wasn't for sugar,—sometimes Miss Hazel would give her a lump, but generally not; only she'd pat her and talk to her, and look in her face, and then Jeannie'd look right at her, and begin to follow round if Miss Hazel just held out her hand. Some days she'd come all the way up from the lodge just so,—not holding the bridle nor nothing,—the prettiest sight you ever saw, sir! She didn't call her Jeannie, either,—it was some short, queer name that I never did quite hear, she'd say it so softly. Most like a bird's talk, of anything.' Phœbe paused, smiling at the remembrance.

It was well her hearer's nerves were in training. He waited, knowing that he should best get the whole by allowing the yarn to reel off unbroken; so now he only gave utterance to an attentive 'But what next, Phœbe?'

'O, sir,' said the girl, suddenly sober again, 'one day —I didn't know where she'd been, Miss Hazel, I mean, —but it was afternoon, and she was coming home. And I was out under the trees like to-day, taking in. And Miss Hazel stopped and sent Lewis back, and came on alone to the steps, sir,—came like the wind!—and jumped off. And then she off with her glove—and you know what Miss Hazel's hand is, sir,—and the little white thing began to fondle Jeannie Deans. Patting

her neck, and stroking her face, and combing out her mane, and fingering her ears; and Jeannie she held her head down, and sideways, as if she meant to give all the help *she* could. And I was looking on, just among the bushes like, when all in a minute Miss Hazel put both her arms right round the horse's neck and laid her head close down—and there she stood.'—Phœbe paused to take breath.

'Not ill *then*, Phœbe?' said her hearer, in a very low tone.

'O, I don't know, sir!' answered Phœbe, her honest eyes all in a flush. 'I don't know! For just as I ran up to see, Mr. Lewis he came back; and the minute Miss Hazel heard, she was off and away up the steps and into the house, and didn't even wait to see if Lewis had found her handkerchief. But, Mr. Rollo, she's never been to ride since that day; not once. And sometimes when she looks round sudden, her eyes'll shine till they frighten you!' And Phœbe wiped her own eyes with the corner of her apron, and looked up for aid and comfort.

'But Phœbe,'—and Collingwood here made an impatient movement rather suddenly and had to be brought back to his business—'what is the evidence of the *illness* you speak about?'

'Nothing else ever kept her from riding, Mr. Rollo. And she don't eat—not three bits, sometimes,—only she 'lucinates Mr. Falkirk so that *he* don't know. And when there's lots and lots of grand company just gone, Miss Hazel will come walking up stairs 'most like one step at a time. There's no flying up and down in the house now, sir. And if you could only once see her eyes, Mr. Rollo! And you know how she used to sing every

five minutes?—well, she don't do *that*,' said Phœbe, with closing emphasis.

'Thank you Phœbe,' said the gentleman at last, 'I am very much obliged to you. I will see what is best to be done.' And with a kind nod to the girl he left her. But Collingwood walked every step of the way from there to the door of the house. Dingee answered the first summons, also showing his teeth with pleasure at sight of Mr. Rollo; and ushering him in, darted away on his errand. But Dingee presently returned, more thoroughly taken aback than often befel him.

'Can't make it out, 'xactly, sir,' he said, hesitating. 'Fact is, it's dreffful hard work to 'member messages,—sight easier made 'em up! But Missee Hazel say, Mas' Rollo—*thought* she say—please to 'scuse her dis afternoon. 'Pears like dat ar' headache done come back,' said Dingee, in his bewilderment. 'He *been* on hand, powerful!'

'I daresay you delivered the message quite right, Dingee,' said the gentleman, not at all surprised at its tenor; and giving the boy something to justify the showing of his ivories again, he went away. And the bay walked every step of the road down the hill through the woods to the gates of Chickaree; but from there he went in a long straight gallop home.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CAPTAIN LANCASTER'S TEAM.

IT was between eight and nine o'clock one evening, two or three days later, when Mr. Rollo was informed that some one wanted to speak to him. It was Reo Hartshorne.

'Very glad to see you home, sir!' said Reo earnestly; he was a man of few words. 'I beg pardon—but are you going to the Governor's to-night, Mr. Rollo?'

'Powder? No.'

'I have just come from taking Miss Wych,' said Reo, and met Lewis, and heard you were home. Mr. Rollo, —do you know that a four-in-hand party goes from Governor Powder's to-night at ten o'clock?'

'I have but lately got home, Reo, and so have not heard quite all the news. But I have nothing to do with the four-in-hand club.'

'Miss Wych bade me come for her at eleven,' said Reo going straight to his point. 'And as she went in, Mr. Nightingale's man laughed and said I'd better not lose my time. Eleven to-morrow would be nearer the mark. And I might have told Mr. Falkirk, sir,—but you were nearer by, and—a trifle quicker. So I came. They're to stop at Greenbush for supper. And if some of those

young men come out as fit to drive as they went in, it'll be something they never did before.'

'You came back this way,—with the carriage?'

'Yes, Mr. Rollo.'

'How do the horses go?'

'First-rate, sir. Want nothing but using.'

'Who is with you? Dingee or Lewis?'

'Lewis.'

'You are not fit to be up all night, Reo. I will take Lewis, and drop you at Chickaree as we pass.'

'Fit to do anything for my little lady, Mr. Rollo. And I know the horses.'

'Very well. Go into the kitchen and get some refreshment. Tell Lewis Miss Maryland and I are going out in the carriage, and we will leave him at Chickaree. I will be ready in fifteen minutes.'

And in fifteen minutes Primrose had been apprized of the service required of her, was ready, and the party set out.

To Greenbush, round by Chickaree, was a drive of twenty miles or more; from Valley Garden it was something less. The road was quiet enough at that hour, winding through a level part of the country, lying white and still in the unclouded moonlight; and Greenbush was reached in due time. The place was little more now than one of those old taverns to be found on any stage route, with its settlement of out-buildings; but the present keeper of the house was an adept, and his suppers were famous. The tavern, however, unlike most of its class, stood in a patch of rather thick woodland, and boasted a high surrounding fence and great gates at either entrance, having been once a grand mansion. House and gateways were all alight now, and the wind-

ing approach through the trees was hung with swinging lamps. But the entrances were guarded.

'No carriage admitted till the four-in-hands come in!' said the men on duty.

On foot, however, privately and humbly, the gentleman and lady were allowed entrance. Rollo secured a comfortable room, with some difficulty, and also ordered and obtained supper, not without scruples and grumbles, all the strength of the house being enlisted in the interests of the coming guests; nevertheless money will do everything; and coffee, cold chicken and bread and butter were served in tolerable style. It availed only for outward circumstances of comfort, for poor Rosy was extremely nervous and troubled in mind; very anxious for Rollo, very discomfited on account of Wych Hazel, very doubtful of the part she herself was to play. Rollo himself was—the red squirrel.

Leaving Rosy with a kind admonition not to worry herself, and to take some bread and chicken, he went out again to see that the carriage was drawn up properly out of the way and Reo's refreshment cared for; and then he took post himself in the shadow of a clump of firs to wait for the expected revellers.

'Pity the lady hadn't stayed too, sir,' said one of the men. 'They'll be along just now. There's more of 'em down than common, this year, they tell me, and it'll be a show.'

Other people thought so too, evidently, for vehicles of various sorts, and people to match, began to gather along the road, till all the space about the entrance-way was well lined. An expectant, rather noisy, crowd, a good deal in the interests of horseflesh but with a certain portion also of interest in gay men and women.

'There they come!'—cried a boy high up in one of the trees; but at first it was only a quiet coach with two horses, Governor Powder's own, and at once admitted. Then there was another pause—and at last down came the four-in-hands, with flashing lamps, and harness that glittered all over in the moonlight, and the fine in-time harmony of the horses' hoof-beats. There was singing too, from some of the turn-outs,—glees and choruses came in a faint wild mingling that rose and fell and changed with the changes of the road.

'Captain Lancaster's ahead!' said one of the men.

'No—it's Richard May.'

'See for yourself, then,' said the other, as the first superb four-in-hand came up; the horses shining almost like their own harness, the drag in the newest style of finish, and with every seat full. A young officer in undress uniform was on the box, and by his side sat Wych Hazel. There was time for but a look as the drag swept round the turn—just time to see who it was, and that she wore no bonnet, but instead a sort of Spanish drapery of black lace, and that his horses gave Captain Lancaster so little concern that Miss Kennedy had nearly all his attention,—then the vision was gone. Not singing, these two, but the spectators heard her sweet laugh. Flashing past, followed by another and another though not all of equal style. The looker-on in the shade of the fir trees just noticed that Kitty Fisher drove the second,—just caught other familiar voices as they flew by.

There is no doubt but Miss Kennedy's younger guardian felt there was a hard task upon him that night. Out of all the glamour and glitter, the brilliance and beauty of such an entertainment, he must be the one

to take her, and substitute an ignominious quiet progress home in her own carriage for the fascination and excitement of Captain Lancaster's driving, and Captain Lancaster's—and many others'—homage. And, worse yet, the authority which he guessed well enough the little lady rebelled against more than against any other point in the arrangement that had displeased her, must must here find its first exercise. However, well as he knew the bad move it was for his own game, Mr. Rollo was not a man to shirk difficult tasks. Neither was he so unpractised a hunter as to conclude that any move that *must* be made, is a bad move. He knew better. So, though he looked grave certainly as he walked back to the house, he walked alertly, like a man ready for business.

He was not in a hurry. He gave time for the first confusion to subside, and for people to get quiet in their places; in so far, that is, as comparative quiet might be predicated of any point of that gay evening. Evening indeed! The moon was riding high in the zenith; it was between twelve and one o'clock. Rollo walked the floor, and Primrose, miserable and anxious, looked at him, and dared not say one word. Would Hazel break friendship with her forever? and kindness with Rollo? And how could Dane dare as he dared!

When supper was just about to be served, one of the attendants entered the room where the party was gathered, asking if Miss Kennedy was there. A lady and gentleman wanted to see Miss Kennedy. The message in due course of time worked round to the young lady.

'Have you got any friends in these parts? said Josephine Powder laughing. It was the way of the entertainment; nothing was said without laughing.

'Must you go?' said Stuart Nightingale.

'Another trick of Kitty Fisher's,' said Wych Hazel. 'That mysterious "lady and gentlemen" again! You know they sent my carriage away once. O yes, I will go and see what mischief is on foot, and be back in a minute.'

The room where Rollo and Prim were waiting was down at one end of the hall; and, dimly lighted as it was, in comparison with the rest of the house, it seemed almost dark. They could see her come down the hall, three or four gentlemen following; and she sending them back with laughing words and glances thrown over her shoulder.

'Now stop just where you are,' she said, turning round. 'I go into the darkness alone, or the charm will be broken.'

And on she came with her airy tread, and was well in the room before she saw anybody, and a servant had shut the door. Then the change on her face was pitiful to see. In the excitement of the drive and other things that night, she had evidently forgotten for the time her new trouble. It came back now on the instant, and for one quick moment she put up her hand to her forehead as if with sudden pain. Then crossed both hands upon her breast, and looked down, and stood still.

Rollo quitted the room. Primrose came to Wych Hazel's side and threw her arms around her.

'It's only I, dear Hazel,' she said in tones of mingled trouble and tenderness.

Miss Kennedy disengaged herself, not roughly but decidedly, holding Primrose off, and looking at her.

'What is the matter?' she said. 'Is Mr. Falkirk ill?

'No, dear.'

'Who then?' said Wych Hazel. 'Prim, never kill people by degrees.'

'Nobody's ill—nobody! There is nothing the matter with anybody, Hazel—except you. I've come to take care of you, dear.'

'Did you?' said the girl. 'I think you want some one to take care of you, by your looks. But I am rather too busy just now to read essays on sentiment,—that can wait.' She moved towards the door; but Primrose made a spring and caught her.

'Wait!—Hazel, you haven't heard what I wanted to say to you. Don't be angry with me! O dear Hazel, do you know what sort of times these four-in-hand people make down here?'

'I intend to find out.'

'But they are not fit for you, Hazel, indeed: it is not a fit place for you to be. Hazel, they are often tipsy when they drive home. Papa wouldn't let me be in such a place and ride with them, for anything. How come you to be here?'

Hazel freed herself again with impatient haste.

'Let go of me!' she said. 'The man who drives *me* home will be sober. I will not hear any more.'

'Listen, Hazel, listen!' cried Prim, clinging to her. 'O do not be angry with me! But you ought not be here; and Duke will not let you stay, dear. We have brought the carriage to take you home.'

Prim never could tell afterwards what sort of a look or what sort of a sound answered that; what she did know was that Wych Hazel was at the door and had it open in her hand. Prim's gentleness, however, on this occasion was no bar to energetic action; with another spring *she* was at the door and had taken it from Wych

Hazel's hand, had shut it, and set her back against it; all too suddenly and determinately to leave chance for prevention.

'Hazel, dear, listen to me. You ought not be here, and Duke will not let you. He has come to take you home, and he brought me with him because he thought it would be nicer for you. And he thought you would rather see me than him; but if you won't listen to me, I must call him in. He will not let you stay, Hazel; and Duke always is right. But he thought you would like better to go quietly off with me than to have any fuss made, and all these people knowing about it and everybody talking. Wouldn't it be nicer to go quietly without any one knowing why you go?'

It was indescribable the way in which Miss Kennedy repeated the word 'nice!' Then she spoke collectedly.

'Prim, I do not want to call in any of my friends—but I declare I will, if you do not move away!'

'Must I call Duke?' said Prim, despairingly keeping her place.

'If you want him'—said Miss Kennedy, turning now towards the bell. As the young lady faced about again, after pulling the bell rope, she was confronted by her unwelcome guardian, just before her.

It is almost proverbially known that the meeting of contrasts is apt to have a powerful influence on one side or the other; unless indeed the opposing forces are, what rarely happens, of equal weight. What met Wych Hazel as she looked at him was power—not of physical strength; the power of high breeding, which is imposing as well as graceful; and also the power of a perfectly unmoved self-possession. While there was at the same time a winsome, gentle look, that she could hardly see

in her agitation, the spirit of which she could partly feel in the voice that spoke to her. Neither cloud nor frown nor discomposure of any sort was in it. He bowed, and then held out his hand.

'Are you angry with me?' he said. 'With me, if anybody. Not Prim.'

In the vagaries of human nature all things are possible. And it is undoubted that in the first flash of eyes which greeted Mr. Rollo there was mingled a certain gleam of fun. Whether the prospect of a tilt had its excitements—whether she was curious to see how he would carry his new office,—there it was. But then the eye shadows grew deep and dark. She drew back a little, not giving her hand; making instead a somewhat formal courtesy.

'I was called here, it seems, to await your commands. Mr. Rollo. May I have them, if they are ready?'

'They are not ready,' he answered, in a very low tone. 'Let Miss Wych Hazel give commands to herself,—and be loyal and true in her obedience to them.'

'I have given myself a good many since I have been in this room,' said the girl, proudly. 'If I had not I should not be here now.'

'Will you sit down?'

'Thank you—no. Unless we are to spend the rest of the night in quiet conversation.'

'Then we will make the conversation short. Miss Hazel, the company and the occasion you came to grace to-night are unworthy of the honour.'

He paused for a reply, but, as none came, he went on:

'You do not know it now, but in the mean time I know it; and I must act upon my knowledge. I have come

to take you home. Cannot you trust me, that I would not—for much—do anything so displeasing to you, without good reason?'

'You men are so fond of being "trusted!"' she said —quietly, though there was some bitterness in the tone —'it is almost a wonder it never occurs to you that a woman might like it too! I know every one of the carriage party with whom I came. And that I did not ask Mr. Falkirk's leave before I left home was only because I did not know that I should need it.' But with that came a quick painful blush, as suddenly remembering other leave that must now be asked.

'I believe you may be trusted thoroughly, so far as your knowledge goes,' he answered, gravely. Then waited a moment and went on.

'You have had no supper. Will you take some refreshment before we set out upon our return journey?'

She stood, leaning against the wall, not looking at anything but the floor—and not seeing that;—as still as if she had not heard him. Thinking—what was she thinking?—Then suddenly stood up and answered.

'I can but obey. May I ask you to wait five minutes? — Stand away, Prim, and let me pass.'

But he stayed her.

'It is better not to set people's tongues at work. I have sent a message to the Miss Powders, to the effect that Miss Kennedy had been suddenly summoned home, and making your excuses. As from yourself. No name but yours appeared.'

If there was any one thing he had done which tried her almost unbearably, it was that! There was a sort of quiet despair in the way she turned from him and the door together, and took the chair she had refused, and

sat waiting. Rollo brought her silently a cup of coffee and a plate with something to eat, but both were refused.

'Are you ready, Prim?'

Primrose nervously put on her bonnet, which she had with nervous unrest taken off; and Rollo offered his arm to Wych Hazel.

'Let me go by myself,' she said—again not roughly, but as if she could not help it. 'I am not going to run away.'

'In that case it is certainly not the arm of a jailor,' said he, stooping down by her and smiling.

But the words, or the look, or something about them, very nearly got the better of Wych Hazel's defences, and her eyes flushed with tears.

'No—no,' she said under her breath. 'I will follow. Go on.'

'Certainly not *me*,' he answered. 'Go you with Prim, and I will follow.'

One before and one behind!—thought the girl to herself, comparing the manner of her entrance. She went on, not with Prim, but swiftly ahead of her, and put herself in the carriage, as she had brought herself out of the house. Prim followed. Rollo mounted the box and took the reins, and, having fresh horses from the inn, they drove off at a smart pace. And Hazel, laying one hand on the sill of the open window, leaned her head against the frame, and so, wrapped in her black lace, sat looking out, with eyes that never seemed to waver. Into the white moonshine,—which soon would give way before the twilight 'which should be dawn and a to-morrow.'

For a long time Primrose bore this, thinking hard toc

on her part. For she had much to think of, in connection with both her companions. She was hurt for Rollo; she was grieved for Wych Hazel; was there anything personal and private to herself in her vexation at the needlessness of the trouble which was affecting them? If there were, Primrose did not look at it much. But it seemed very strange in her eyes that any one should rebel against what was, to her, the honey sweetness of Dane's authority. Strange that anything he disliked, should be liked by anybody that had the happiness of his care. And strange beyond strangeness, that this girl should slight such words and looks as he bestowed upon her. Primrose knew how deep the meaning of them was; *she* knew how great the grace of them was; could it be possible Wych Hazel did not know? One such word and look would have made her happy for days; upon a few of them she could have lived a year. So it seemed to her. She did not wish that they were hers; she did not repine that they were another's; she only thought these things. But there were other thoughts that came up, as a sigh dismissed the foregoing.

'Hazel—' she ventured gently, when half of the way was done.

Hazel's thoughts had been so far away that she started.

'What?' she said hastily.

'May I talk to you, just a little bit?'

'O yes,—certainly. Anybody may do anything to me.' But she kept her position unchanged. 'I am listening, Prim.'

'Hazel, dear, are you quite sure you are doing right?'

'About what?'

'About— Please don't take it ill of me, but it troubles me, Hazel. About this sort of life you are leading.'

'This sort of life?' Hazel repeated, thinking over some of the days last past. 'Much you know about it!'

'I do not suppose I do. I cannot know much about it,' said Primrose meekly. 'All *my* way of life has been so different. But do you think, Hazel, really, that there is not something better to do with one's self than what all these gay people do?'

'I think you are a great deal better than I am—if that will content you.'

'Why should it content me?' said Primrose, laughing a little. 'I do not see anything pleasant in it, even supposing it were true.'

'There is some use in training you,' Hazel went on; 'but no amount of pruning would ever bring me into shape.' And with that, somehow, there came up the thought of a little sketch, wherein her hat swung gayly from the top of a rough hazel bush; and with the thought a pain so keen, that for the moment her head went down upon her hands on the window-sill.

Primrose was silent a few moments, not knowing just how to speak.

'But Hazel,' she began, slowly—'all these gay people you are so much with, they live just for the pleasure of the minute; and when the pleasure of the minute is over, what remains? I cannot bear to have you forget that, and become like them.'

'Like them?' said Hazel. 'Am I growing like Kitty Fisher?'

'No, no, no!' cried Primrose. 'You are not a bit like her, not a bit. I did not mean that; but I mean, dear,—aren't you just living for the moment's pleasure, and forgetting something better?'

'Forgetting a good many things, you think.'

'Aren't you, Hazel? And I cannot bear to have you.'

'What am I to remember?' said the girl in a sort of dreamy tone, with her thoughts on the wing.

'Remember that you have something to do with your life and with yourself, Hazel; something truly noble and happy and worth while. I am sure dancing-parties are not enough to live on. Are they?'

'No.'

Perhaps Primrose thought she had said enough; perhaps she did not know how to choose further words to hit the girl's mood. She was patiently silent. Suddenly Hazel sat up and turned towards her.

'You poor little Prim!' she said, laying gentle hands on her shoulders and a kiss on each cheek,—'whirled off from your green leaves on a midnight chase after witches! This was one of Mr. Rollo's few mistakes: he should have come alone.'

'Should he?' said Primrose, wondering. 'But it wouldn't have been so good for you, dear, would it?'

'Prim'—somewhat irrelevantly—'did you ever have a thorn in your finger?'

'What do you mean?' Primrose answered in just bewilderment.

'Well I have two in mine.' And Miss Kennedy went back to the window and her world of moonlight. She did not wonder that the Indians reckoned their time by 'moons;' she was beginning to check off her own existence in the same way. In one moon she had walked home from Merricksdale, in another driven back from Mrs. Seaton's; and now in this—But then her head went down upon the window-sill once more, nor was

lifted again until the carriage was before the steps of Chickaree.

'Dane,' said Primrose, as the two were parting in the dusky hall at home, 'she will never get over this. Never, never, never!'

He kissed her, laughing, and giving her hand a warm grasp.

'You are mistaken,' he said. She is a more sensible woman than you give her credit for.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HITS AT CROQUET.

THE second day after the four-in-hand club affair, the following note was brought to Miss Hazel :

'Will you ride with me this afternoon ?

'M. O. R.'

And perhaps five words have seldom taken longer to write than these which he received by return messenger :

'Not to-day. Please excuse me.

'Wych Hazel.'

It happened that invitations were out for a croquet party at Chickaree ; and the day of the party was appointed the third succeeding these events. Thither of course all the best of the neighborhood were invited.

The house at Chickaree stood high on a hill ; nevertheless immediately about the house there was lawn-room enough and smooth greensward for the purposes of the play. The very fine old trees which bordered and overshadowed it lent beauty and dignity to the little green ; and the long, low, grey house, with some of its windows open to the verandah, and the verandah itself extending the whole length of the building, with cane garden-chairs and Indian settees hospitably planted, made a

cheery, comfortable background. September was yet young, and the weather abundantly warm; the sort of weather when everybody wants to be out of doors. No house in the country could show a prettier croquet-green than Chickaree that afternoon.

Mr. Falkirk had mounted the hill in advance of other comers, and stood surveying the prospect generally from the verandah.

'Who is to be here, Miss Hazel? I am like a bear newly come out of winter-quarters—only that my seclusion has been in the other season of the year.'

'Pray let the resemblance go no further, sir! Who is to be here?' said Miss Kennedy, drawing on her dainty gloves,—'all the available people, I suppose. Unless they change their minds.'

'Have the goodness to enlighten me. *Available* people—available for what?'

'Croquet—and flirting.'

'If you please—I understand, I believe, the first term; it means, to stand on the green and roll balls about among each other's feet; but what is comprehended in "flirting"?'

'Standing in the air and rolling balls there,' said Miss Kennedy.

'Ah! Don't people get hit occasionally?'

'Very likely. But they do not tell.'

'Ah! My dear, has anybody hit you?'

'Thank you, sir,—I generally keep on the ground.'

Mr. Falkirk suspended his questions for the space of five minutes.

'I have not heard of your taking any rides lately,' he began again.

'No, sir.'

'How comes that?'

'It comes by my refusing to go.'

'Why, my dear? said her guardian, looking her innocently in the face.

'Aren't you glad, sir?—How do you do, Mr. Kingsland? Will you be kind enough to explain to Mr. Falkirk the last code of flirtation? while I go and give an order.'

'It is the only thing in which Miss Kennedy is not unsurpassed,—to make my definition short,' said the gentleman, taking a chair. 'I think she will never learn.'

Primrose Maryland was the immediate next arrival; and she sat down on the other side of Mr. Falkirk, looking as innocent as her name. Mr. Falkirk had always a particular favour for Primrose.

'Did you come alone, my dear?' he incautiously asked; for Mr. Kingsland was at his other elbow. And Prim knew no better than to answer according to fact.

'Where is Rollo?'

'I don't know, sir. I suppose he is at home.'

'Doubtless thinking one guardian may suffice—as it is a mere croquet party,' said Mr. Kingsland smoothly, but with a covert glance of his eye at Mr. Falkirk. Both Primrose and Mr. Falkirk glanced at him in return, but his words got no other recognition, for people began to come upon the scene. And the scene speedily became gay; everybody arriving by the side entrance and passing through the broad hall to the front of the house. Wych Hazel, returned from her errand, came now slowly through the hall herself with the last arrival.

'I feared you were ill with fatigue,' said a pleasant man's voice. 'Three times I have called to inquire, and three times gone away in despair.'

'I was very tired.'

'But what was the matter?' said the gentleman, pausing in the doorway. 'Some call of sudden illness? a demand upon your sympathies?'

'Nothing of the kind.'

'How then?' said Captain Lancaster, with an appearance of great interest. 'One does not lose a pleasure—and such a pleasure—without at least begging to know why. If it is permitted. We began to think that the witches must have got hold of you in that dark room.'

'One did,' said the girl, so gravely that Captain Lancaster was posed. She knew perfectly well what ears were listening; but there was something in her nature which always disdained to creep out of a difficulty; so she stood still, and answered as he had spoken, aloud.

'O, Miss Kennedy,' cried Molly Seaton, 'that's a fib. Not a real witch?'

'Pretty genuine, I think,' said Hazel, with her half laugh.

Now there is no way in the world to puzzle people like telling them the truth. The gentleman and the lady were puzzled. Stuart Nightingale and half a dozen more came up at the instant; and the question of the game to be played, for the time scattered all other questions.

For a while now the little green at Chickaree was a pretty sight. Dotted with a moving crowd of figures, in gay-coloured dresses, moving in graceful lines or standing in pretty attitudes; the play, the shifting of places, the cries and the laughter, all made a flashing, changing picture, full of life and full of picturesque prettiness. The interests of the game were at first absorbing. When a long match had been played, however,

and there was a pause for refreshments, there was also a chance for rolling balls in the more airy manner Wych Hazel had indicated.

'What was the matter the other night?' Stuart Nightingale demanded softly, as he brought the little lady of the house an ice.

'I could not stay.'

'Summoned home by no disaster?'—

'It was a sort of disaster to me to be obliged to go,' said Wych Hazel, 'but I found neither earthquake nor volcano at home.'

'Who came for you, Hazel?' said Phinny Powder, pushing into the group which was forming. '*I* said it was downright wicked to let you go off so. How did we know but that something dreadful had got hold of you? I thought they ought all of them to go in a body and knock the doors down and find out. But after your message they wouldn't. Who *did* come for you, Hazel?'

'Who did?' said Hazel. 'Do you think it could have been the same parties who once sent away my carriage when I wanted it?'

'No,' said Phinny; 'I know it wasn't. But who *did* come for you, Hazel? Nobody knew where you were. And what made you go, if there was no earthquake at home, as you said?'

'Were you *made* to go, really?' asked Mme. Lasalle, slyly. 'Has Josephine hit the mark with a stray arrow?'

'O, of course I was made to go,—or I shouldn't have gone,' said Wych Hazel lightly. 'My own carriage came for me, Josephine, and I came home in it. Do you feel any better?'

'No, I don't!' said that young lady boldly, while

others who were silent used their eyes. '*You* didn't order it, and I just want to know who did. O, Hazel, I want to ask you—' But she lowered her voice and glanced round her suspiciously.

'Is it safe? Where is that old Mr. ——? do you see him anywhere? He has eyes, and I suppose he has ears. Hush! I guess it's safe. Hazel, my dear, *have* you got two guardians, you poor creature?'

'Have you only just found that out?' said Hazel, drawing a little back from the whisper and answering aloud. 'Prim, what will you have? Mr. May, please bring another ice for Miss Maryland.'

'Well, I've guessed it all summer,' said Kitty Fisher, putting her word in now. 'I always knew that when Miss Kennedy turned round, the Duke turned too, to see what she was looking at.'

If truth be no slander, it is sometimes full as hard to bear. Wych Hazel eat her own ice for the next two minutes and wondered what it was.

'Hazel, my dear, you had need to be a saint!' Mme. Lasalle whispered. 'It is—absolutely—outrageous; something not to be borne!'

'But the fun of it is,' broke in Kitty again, 'that we all took it for granted it was mere lover-like devotion! And now, behold, c'est tout au contraire!'

Since the day of the ride it had been war to the knife with Kitty Fisher.

'Kitty! Kitty!' said Mr. Kingsland in soft deprecation.

'My dear,' Mme. Lasalle went on mockingly, 'perhaps he would not approve of your eating so much ice. Hadn't you better take care?'

'Must we ask him about everything now, before we

can have you?' cried Josephine, in great indignation, quite unfeigned, though possibly springing from a double root. 'O, was it *he* came for you to Greenbush?'

But with that Hazel roused herself.

'You had better ask him anything you want answered,' she said. 'I think he has quite a genius that way.'

'What way? O, you know, friends, perhaps *she likes it*. What way Hazel?'

'Does he speak soft when he gives his orders?' said Kitty Fisher. 'Or does he use his ordinary tone?'

'And oh, Miss Kennedy,' said little Molly Seaton, 'isn't it *awfully* nice to have such a handsome man tell you what to do?'

Now Hazel had been at her wits' end, feeling as if there was a trap for her, whatever she said or did not say. Pain and nervousness and almost fright had kept her still. But Molly's question brought things to such a climax, that she burst into an uncontrollable little laugh and so answered everybody at once in the best manner possible. The sound of her laugh brought back the gentlemen too,—roaming off after their own ices,—and that would make a diversion.

But it came up again and again. It was to some too tempting a subject of fun; for others it had a deeper interest; it could not be suffered to lie still. Wych Hazel's ears could hardly get out of the sound of raillery, in all sorts of forms; from the soft insinuation of mischief in a mosquito's song, to the downright attacks of Kitty Fisher's teeth and Phinny Powder's claws. The air was full of it at last, to Wych Hazel's fancy; even the gentlemen, when they dared not speak openly, seemed in manner or tone to be commiserating or laughing at her.

'The diplomacy of truth!' said Mr. Kingsland to Mr. Falkirk, as Hazel passed near them with Mme. Lasalle. 'I must believe in it as a fixed fact,—where it exists! I should judge, by rough estimate, that Miss Kennedy had been asked about fifty-five trying questions this day; and in not one case, to my knowledge, has her answer even clipped the truth. She is a ninth wonder,—and from that on to the twenty-ninth! With all her innocence and ignorance—which would not comprehend nine-tenths of what might be said to her, I do not know the man who would dare say one word which she should not hear!'—With which somewhat unusual expression of his feelings Mr. Kingsland took himself away, leaving Prim and Mr. Falkirk alone on the verandah.

But it was a rather weary-faced young hostess that wrapped Prim up, after that, and the lips that kissed her were hot.

Mr. Falkirk went down to his cottage and came back to breakfast the next morning, without having broached to his ward several subjects which stirred his thoughts. Finding himself in the fresh light of the new day, and in the security of the early morning, seated opposite Miss Hazel at the breakfast table, with the croquet confusion a thing of the past, he opened his mind.

'You had no wine yesterday, my dear, I observed.'

'No, sir. As I intended.'

'That is not according to custom—of other people.'

'It is my custom—henceforth,' said Wych Hazel.

'Are the reasons too abstruse for my comprehension?'

The girl looked up at him, her eyes kindling.

'Mr. Falkirk,' she said, 'if ever again a man gets a glass of wine from my hand, or in my house, I shall deserve to live that July night all over!'

Mr. Falkirk did not at all attempt to combat this conclusion. He ate his toast with an extremely thoughtful face for some minute or two.

'Suppose, by and by, there should be two words to that bargain?'

'Then there will be several more, sir,—that is all,' she said steadily, though her face glowed.

'You mean that you will fight for your position?'

'Inch by inch. Fight for it, and keep it.'

Mr Falkirk's lips gave way a little, though with what expression it was impossible to determine.

'To remark that your position will be remarked upon as peculiar is, I am aware, to make a fruitless expenditure of words in your hearing, Miss Hazel. But it will not make much difference what you do, my dear. They will find the article, in its varieties, at every other house that is open to them.' Mr. Falkirk was thinking probably of young men.

'Well, sir—I, at least, will have no part in making any man unfit to speak to a woman.'

Mr. Falkirk ruminated again, and then broke out:

'Why did not Rollo come with Miss Maryland yesterday?'

'I presume, because he did not want to come,—but perhaps you had better ask him,' said Miss Hazel.

'Why should I ask him?' returned her guardian, looking up at her. 'Has Mr. Rollo offended you, Miss Hazel?'

'I merely thought you wanted to know, sir. No,' she answered, to his last question. 'He was invited—if that is what you mean.'

'I fancied,' said Mr. Falkirk, looking puzzled, 'that in the general buzz of tongues yesterday—which is fit to

confuse anything with more brains than a mosquito—I heard various buzzings which seemed to have reference to him. Perhaps I was wrong. I did not mean to listen, but if a fly gets into your ear it is difficult not to know it. Was I right, or was I wrong?'

'Right, I fancy, sir. Mr. Rollo's name is very often upon people's tongues.'

'What did they mean? What was it about?'

She hesitated a little.

'I daresay your opinion was correct, Mr. Falkirk, as to the meaning as well as the buzz. It is hardly worth bringing up again.'

If Mr. Falkirk had any roughness in his manner or in his composition, he had also and certainly a very gentle side of it for his ward. He looked at her again and dropped the subject. But he had got another. He waited a little before bringing it up.

'Another thing I heard confused my ideas, Miss Hazel. You must not wonder at me; you know, a bear *just* out of winter quarters might well be astonished at coming into a garden full of crickets, and a little unable to distinguish one song from another. But it seemed to me that I heard something said—or alluded to—about your being unwillingly obliged to go home from somewhere. Can you give me any explanation?'

The pause was longer this time, the colour unsteady. Then she put both hands up to her forehead, pushing back the dark rings of hair with an impatient touch, and began, speaking low and rapidly, but straight to the point.

'I was invited to a garden party at Mrs. Powder's, and after I got there, found out that the invitation included a four-in-hand drive to Greenbush. And I went. And Mr. Rollo heard of my going, and followed me there.

with Primrose and Reo and the carriage, and made me come back.'—She had gone on, throwing in details, as if to prevent their being called for. Now the scarlet flush with which the last words were spoken faded away, and she sat silent and rather pale.

I suppose Mr. Falkirk had done his breakfast. If not, he lost the last part of it. For as Wych Hazel stopped speaking he rose from the table and began to take turns up and down the room; scowling, it must be confessed, as if he would have rather liked an excuse to 'pitch into' his co-guardian. He said nothing for some minutes, and it was not necessary; his eyebrows were eloquent.

'A four-in-hand party!' he said at last. 'Who got it up?'

'Some of the four-in-hand club.'

'Who are they, Miss Hazel?'

'Mr. May, Captain Lancaster, Dr. Singleton,—Hazel named over sundry other names that were unknown to Mr. Falkirk.

'He's a bold man!' said Mr. Falkirk, probably not referring to any member of the club aforesaid. 'I wonder at his impudence. But, my dear!—a four-in-hand party, and Greenbush at night,—that was no sort of place for you to be! Do you know how these parties come home, who go out so bravely?'

'I knew pretty well, sir, how *my* party would,' said his ward.

'No you didn't. How should you know anything about it? The young mouse in the fable thought the cat was a very fine gentleman. Con—found him!' said Mr. Falkirk, stopping short, 'how did he know? Was he at the garden party at the Governor's?'

'No, sir.'

'Then how did he know where you were?'

'Mr. Rollo seems to be a man who gives close attention to his duties, sir,'—rather dryly.

'I was the proper person to be applied to,' muttered Mr. Falkirk. 'I should like to be informed how this came about?'

But Miss Hazel not giving—as indeed she was in no position to give—any light on this point, Mr. Falkirk walked a little more, and then brought up with:

'Don't go again, my dear.'

'I am not likely to go often anywhere, at such a risk!' said Wych Hazel, the tide beginning to overflow again.—'Poor little me!' she broke out, in a tone that was sorrowful as well as impatient,—'always in charge of two policemen! Why, you could almost keep a convict in order with that!' Then in a moment she sprang up, and coming to her guardian's side laid her hand on his arm. 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Falkirk! I did not mean it in any way to hurt you.'

'No, my dear,' said her guardian, gently, laying his hand on hers. 'I am not hurt. I understand, as I ought, having seen you twitch yourself out of leading-strings ever since you were old enough to go. It is rather hard upon you. But how came it to your knowledge, Hazel?' And Mr. Falkirk looked grave.

'It came—through somebody telling Mrs. Coles what was none of her business,' said the girl, with more energy than exactness of wording.

'Who did that?'

'I am sure I don't know, sir. She talks as if she had known it always.'

'Like enough. And she told you! The whole story, my dear?' added Mr. Falkirk, gently and softly.

'I hope there is nothing more!' said Hazel, again donning her scarlet in hot haste.

'Enough and too much!' muttered Mr. Falkirk. 'Poor child! So the old guardian is better than the young one, my dear?'

'It used to be supposed,' said the girl, dancing off out of the room, 'that twice one is two. But I am inclined to think that twice one is six!'—Which was all the satisfaction Mr. Falkirk got.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FRIENDLY TONGUES.

YES, it was very hard for her; much harder than any one knew but herself. The joke was too striking to be passed by, even in the case of an ordinary person; but when it was Miss Kennedy,—heiress, beauty, and queen of favour,—all tongues took it up. She could go nowhere, wear nothing, do nothing, without meeting that one subject face to face. Many things brought it forward. Kitty Fisher of course had exasperation in her heart; but there were other (supposably) gentle breasts where even less lovely feelings, of shorter names, found lodgment. Hazel was condoled with, laughed at, twitted, by turns; until even Mr. Rollo's name in the distance made her shrink. Mrs. Coles had not (apparently) made known the conditions upon which he had assumed his office; but Wych Hazel was in daily terror lest she would; and as people often graze the truth which yet they do not know, so hardest of all to bear just now, were Kitty Fisher's two new names for her: 'the Duchess,' and 'Your Grace.' Most people indeed did not know their point, ignorant of Prim's pet name for Mr. Rollo; but Wych Hazel needed no telling; and her face was sometimes a thing to see.

That was the worst of is!—it *was* a thing to see. And so, while now and then one of her special gentlemen friends would interpose, and draw the strokes upon himself; yet her delicate, womanly fencing was so pretty, so novel; it was such sport to watch the little hands turn off and parry Kitty Fisher's rude thrusts; that few masculine hearts were unselfish enough to forego it. There were actual wagers out as to how long 'the Duchess' could carry it on without losing her temper or clipping the truth; and how soon 'the Fisher' would get tired and give it up. And as for the tokens in Miss Kennedy's face sometimes, who that had once seen them did not watch to see them again? Other people began to take up the new titles; and Mme. Lasalle made courtesies to 'the Duchess,' and Stuart Nightingale and Mr. May bowed low before 'her Grace,' entreating her hand for the quadrille or the promenade.

'And some night he will be standing by and hear them say it!' thought Wych Hazel to herself. What should she do? Where should she go?

Since the talk on the drive home from Mme. Lasalle's, the girl had never set foot in one of the round dances. Not that she gave in to Mr. Rollo's strictures,—how could *she* be mistaken?—but because the talk had left an unbearable association about everything that looked like a round dance. There was the constant remembrance of the words he had spoken,—there was the constant fear that he might stand by and think those thoughts again. Then she had been extremely disgusted with Kitty Fisher's new figures; and so, on the whole, in the face of persuasions and charges of affectation, Miss Kennedy could be had for nothing but reels, country dances, and quadrilles. Miss Fisher and her set were

furious, of course; for all the gentlemen liked what Miss Kennedy liked: there was no use talking about it.

If anybody had asked the girl in those weeks before the fancy ball what she was doing—and why she wanted to do it,—she would have found it hard to tell. Braving out people's tongues, was one thing; and plunging into all sorts of escapades because any day they might be forbidden, was another. A sort of wild resolving that her young guardian should *not* feel his power; and endeavour to prove to him that anybody aspiring to that office without her leave asked and obtained, was likely to serve a short term.

'Is it only till you marry, my dear?—or is it for life?' Mme. Lasalle said, meaningly. And Hazel laughed off an answer, and set her little foot down (mentally) with tremendous force. Wouldn't she marry whom she liked—*if* she liked?

'He proposes to make you his wife'—Mrs. Coles had said. She would like to know what his 'proposing' had to do with it?—except, perhaps, as an initiatory step.

It was a new version of *Katharine and Petruchio*,—sneered Kitty Fisher.

It was a striking instance of disinterested benevolence—in so young a man! chimed in Mrs. Seaton,—until at last Hazel rushed into anything that would put a black coat or whirl of white muslin between her and her tormentors. If she was in truth running away from herself as well, the confusion was too great for her to know it just then. The very idea of stopping to think what he meant and what she meant, frightened her; and then she ran faster than ever.

Of all this Rollo was but slightly aware. Yet he did guess at part of it. He had seen too much of both men

and women not to know in a measure what must be the natural effect of circumstances. And he would have saved Miss Kennedy the worst of it,—only he could not. He was sometimes at the entertainments where she met so much exasperation, and saw from a distance as it were the wild whirl of her gaiety. Perhaps he guessed at the meaning of that too. But he was only a man, and he could not be sure. He never asked her to dance himself, and never joined a quadrille or reel when she was one of the set. And that is nearly tantamount to saying he did not dance at all. For reels and quadrilles were very much out of favour, and rarely adopted except just for Miss Kennedy. And in truth Mr. Rollo in this state of affairs chose to be only now and then seen at evening entertainments. When there he was rather Spanish in his manners, after the old Catskill fashion. Very Spanish indeed Mrs. Coles found him at home; his lofty courtesy kept her at the extreme distance permitted in the grace of good manners.

Meanwhile, no *tête-à-tête* conversation had been practicable with Wych Hazel. He had sought it; but she refused his invitations to ride, and while she was in that mood he did not choose either to risk being turned away again from the Chickaree door, or to encounter her in a drawing-room full of company. However, when a good many days had come and gone in this state of estrangement, Rollo began to feel that it was getting unbearable. So he rode up to Chickaree one day just at luncheon time.

Miss Kennedy was not at home. Not at home in the honest sense of the words. Mr. Rollo asked for Mrs. Bywank, and marched straight to the housekeeper's room. And Mrs. Bywank's greeting made him feel

that, for some reason, he had come at the right time. She begged him to sit down, and ordered luncheon; asking if he was in haste, or if they might wait a little for Miss Wych?

'She walked down to Mr. Falkirk's a long time ago,' said the housekeeper, 'but I am looking for her every minute. Unless you cannot wait, Mr. Rollo?'

He would wait; and desired to have Mrs. Bywank's report touching the health of her young mistress. Mrs. Bywank looked perplexed.

'She's not herself, sir,' she answered slowly. 'And yet it would be hard to explain that. I've been wanting to see you, Mr. Rollo, more than I can say; and now you are here I hardly know how to tell why.'

'That makes me wish very much you would find out.'

'Phœbe will have it she is sick,' said the housekeeper pondering,—'and sometimes I think so myself. I know she goes out too much. And stays up too late. Why the last time she came from Governor Powder's I was frightened half to death.'

'That was two weeks ago?'

'Yes, Mr. Rollo. I expected her early, and then Lewis brought word it would be late,—and so it was. Near morning, in fact.'

'Yes. Well?—She did not suffer from being out too late?'

'I'm sure I don't know, sir, what it was. She walked into the hall just as strong and straight as ever, and then she dropped right down on the first stair, and put her hands and face against the balustrade, and I couldn't get one word from her—nor one look,—any more than if she'd been part of the staircase.'

'For how long?' asked the gentleman after a short pause, and in a lowered tone.

'It seemed a week to me,' said Mrs. Bywank,—'but I only know nothing stirred her till she heard the servants begin to move about the house. And then she got up, in a sort of slow way, so that I thought she would fall. And I put my arm around her, and she laid her head on my shoulder, and so we went upstairs. But she only said she was "very, very tired," and didn't want any breakfast. I couldn't get another word but that.'

'And since then?'—said her hearer, after another pause in which he seemed to have forgotten himself.

'Since then,' said Mrs. Bywank, 'there have been balls and picnics and dinners enough to take one's breath away. But it don't seem to me she can enjoy them much —she comes home so often with a sort of troubled look that I can't understand. And when I ask if she's not well, she says, "Yes, very well." So what is one to do?'

'I don't think you can do anything, Mrs. Bywank. Perhaps I can. Is that all you have to tell me?'

'Not quite, sir,'—but the old housekeeper hesitated. 'I am not sure about saying all I wanted to say.'

'Why?' said Rollo, smiling.

'It is a nice matter for one woman to talk about another woman,' said Mrs. Bywank; and again she paused, evidently considering where care ended and treason began. 'I am a little uneasy, sir,—more than a little,—about some of these young men that come here so often.'

'On what account?' said Rollo shortly and gravely, with a tone that meant to get to the bottom of *that* at least.

'Why,' said Mrs. Bywank, glancing at him, 'chiefly because I think Miss Wych does not know in the least how often they come. Which, if she thought twice about any one of them, she would. And if I just hint it to her, she looks at me and says—"Often?—when was he here before? I don't remember." All the same, *they* don't understand that.'

'Well?' said Rollo. 'They are quite equal to taking care of themselves. Tell me of any danger to *her*.'

'It lies just there, sir. That she might be drawn on—in her innocence—to grant favours covering she knows not what. And sometimes that works trouble. Not caring two snaps for the men, it might never occur to her that they *were* favours—till the cobwebs were all round her feet. You know that, sir?'

Her hearer's brows contracted a little, and the grey eyes snapped; but he was silent.

'Now here's this fancy ball at Moscheloo,' said Mrs. Bywank,—'with all sorts of charades that nobody ought to be in.'

'What is that? I have not heard of it.'

'I opine they have kept it rather close,' said the housekeeper,—'the day after to-morrow it comes off; and not a soul let in without a ticket. I hoped you might have one, Mr. Rollo.'

'What about the charades?'

'I don't like them,' said Mrs. Bywank decidedly,—'and they want Miss Wych in every one. So she's been getting her dresses ready, with my help, and telling me the whole story. It's "Mr. May and I are to do this,"—and "While I stand so, Captain Lancaster stands so." The last of all is a wedding.'

'A wedding!' Rollo repeated. 'Is she to be in that too?

'Of course,' said Mrs. Bywank. 'And she said she tried ever so hard to get a ticket for me—that I might see her dressed up. But Madame would not. So said I, "Miss Wych, I would rather not see you in *that* dress, till it's the real thing."

'"O—take what you can get," she said, running the needle into her finger and making a great fuss about it.

'"My dear," I said, "marriage is much too sacred a thing, in *my* judgment, to be turned into a frolic."

'"Well I didn't want to do it," she said, a little sober; "but Madame would not let me off."'

'Well?—' said Rollo, with a short breath, as the old lady again paused.

'"But Miss Wych," I said, "are you to act *that* with Captain Lancaster?"

'So she flamed out at that, and asked me if I thought she would?

'"Well," said I, "for my part, I don't understand how any young lady who expects to be married"—but she put her hand right over my mouth.

'"Now Byo, stop!" she said. "You know you are talking of *me*—not of other young ladies."

'"Who is to be the happy man in this case?" said I, when she would let me speak. And she just looked at me, and wouldn't answer a word. So I went on. "I suppose I may talk about men, Miss Wych,— and I say I don't think the right sort of man, who meant some day to marry the right sort of woman, would ever want to go through the motions with somebody else."—She was silent a while,— then she looked up.

'"I wish I had heard all this before, Byo,—but it's too late now, for I've promised. And of course I never

thought it all out so. You know I've never even seen a wedding. But it is only Mr. Lasalle, in this case ; and you know *he* has 'been through the motions'"—Mr. Lasalle, truly!' Mrs. Bywank repeated in great scorn. 'A likely thing!'

'Going through the motions!' Rollo repeated. 'Do you mean that the wedding ceremnoy is to be performed?'

'It sounds so, to me,' said Mrs. Bywank. '"Well, my dear," said I,—"then I say this. No man who has been through the motions in earnest with one woman, ought to go them over in play with another."

'She looked up again,—one of her pretty, grave looks ; and said slowly, as if she was thinking out her words : "Maybe you are right, Byo. I never thought about it. And of course *that* sort of man never could."

'"What sort?" I said. "Then you *have* thought about it, Miss Wych?"—Well, she was like a little fury at that,' said Mrs. Bywank, smiling at the recollection, —'as near as she can ever come to it. And she caught up her hat and went off ; and called back to me that she meant to go through motions enough of some sort, to be ready for her lunch when she got home.—But I wish she was out of it, Mr. Rollo.'

Her hearer sat silent for a minute.

'Mrs. Bywank, can you find Miss Hazel's ticket for this ball?'

'I daresay, sir. Would you like to see it?—she shewed it to me.'

'I would like to see it very much.'

The housekeeper went off, and presently brought back the little perfumed card, with scrolls and signatures, and 'Admit——' and 'Not transferable.'

'She puts her own name in this place before she gives it in,' said Mrs. Bywank.

The gentlemen looked at the ticket attentively—then bestowed it safely in his vest pocket; as if that subject was disposed of.

'But Mr. Rollo!'—said the housekeeper in some consternation.

'What, Mrs. Bywank?' he returned innocently.

'Miss Wych will never forgive me, sir!'

'What?'

'Why—for stealing her ticket and giving it to you, sir.'

'You have not stolen it. And you never meant to give it to me. And she is not to know anything about it.'

'It feels like high treason!' said Mrs. Bywank. 'And she is certain to get another. But I'm sure I'd be glad there was some one there to look after things; for if she once got into that, and found young Nightingale or some of the rest with her, she'd be fit to fly. And there she comes, this minute.'

As they looked, Wych Hazel came out from the deep shadow of the trees that clothed this end of the garden approach; faultlessly dressed as usual, and with her apron gathered up full of flowers; and herself not alone. A young 'undress uniform' was by her side.

'Captain Lancaster,'—said Mrs. Bywank.

They came slowly on, talking; then stopped where the road to the main entrance branched off,—the young officer cap in hand, extremely deferential. They could see his face now; handsome, soldierly, and sunburnt; with a pleasant laugh which came readily at her words. Her face they could not see, beneath the broad garden

hat. The gentleman touched his ungloved hand to Wych Hazel's little buff gauntlet; then apparently preferred some request which was not immediately granted; so gestures seemed to say. Finally he held out his hand again; and she took from her apron a flower and placed in it; and it looked as if fingers and flower were taken together for a second. It was a pretty scene; and yet Mrs. Bywank sighed. Then with a profound reverence the young officer moved away, and Wych Hazel entered the side door. She came on along the passage singing; trilling out the gay little lullaby by virtue of which Mrs. Bywank had long ago earned her name.

'Byo, bye! baby bye!
Byo, bye, little baby!
Byo, byo, byo, byo'—

'Where are you, Byo dear?' she said, opening the door. Then stopped short in undoubted surprise. 'Mr. Rollo!—You two!' she said, looking from one to the other; adding mentally, 'And you have been talking about me!'

It was not just a pleased flush that came; and it was with a little needless straightening of herself up that Wych Hazel crossed the floor, and untying her apron of flowers laid it down on Mrs. Bywank's sofa. Then she was the lady of Chickaree again, graceful and composed. She came back and held out her hand.

'I hope your luncheon is ready, Byo?' she said; 'and that you have something very good to reward Mr. Rollo for his long waiting. I had no idea I was delaying any one but you, or I should have made more haste. Mrs. Bywank spoils me, Mr. Rollo, by giving me just the

same welcome whether I come early or late. But I am very sorry if I have hindered you.'

'You have not hindered me,' he said smiling, and giving her hand the old sort of clasp,—'except from everything I have tried to do, for some time past.'

But that idea Miss Wych did not see fit to take up.

'What have I done,' he went on audaciously, 'to be ignored in this fashion?'

'Ignored!' she said, opening her eyes at him.

'Will you substitute another word?' said he, looking for it in the orbs so revealed. Wych Hazel turned off.

'Will you come to luncheon, sir?' she said; so exactly as if she were speaking to Mr. Falkirk, that Mrs. Bywank looked up in mute amazement.

But lunch was not to have much attention, nevertheless. Dingee began a raid on the housekeeper's room. It was:

'Mas' Nightingale, Missee Hazel.'

'Mas' May and—Miss May,' ma'am.—'

'Mrs. Powder, Missee Hazel—and all de rest!' added Dingee. ''Spect dere ain't a livin' soul *won't* be there, time I get back. Miss Fisher, she done ask for Mas' Rollo. But I'se learnin' to tell the truf fustrate.

'What is the truth about me, Dingee?' asked the gentleman. 'I should be glad to hear it.'

'Well, sir,' said Dingee, 'standing attention,' 'she 'quire 'bout you. So I say, "Mas' Rollo, he done come dis mornin', sure,—but my young mistiss she out. So he done gone straight away from de door, ma'am." Mighty glad she never ask which way!' added Dingee with a chuckle. Wych Hazel held down her head, laughing the sweet laugh which would come now and then, in the worst of times.

'Run away,' she said, 'and say I am coming. I must go, Byo—if Mr. Rollo will excuse me. And as he came to see you, I suppose he will!'

But Mr. Rollo went away without his luncheon, after all.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FIGURES AND FAVOURS.

THE very night after this affair of the ticket, came a 'German,' pure and simple, at one of the far-off houses of the neighbourhood. The daughters here were of Miss Fisher's persuasion ; and among them they had arranged the whole affair. This should be a 'German,' and nothing else. Kitty Fisher was to lead, and neither quadrille nor country dance would be tolerated for a moment. Miss Kennedy found on her arrival that, for this night at least, round dances were paramount : it was such, or none. Well, she thought she could stand it, at first,—there were enough people always ready to promenade. But this was not an outdoor party, the night was too cool to make it even partially such ; and to walk the whole evening in the moonlight is one thing, and in the gaslight quite another. Then Kitty Fisher was in a merciless mood,—and Hazel could not head her off with flat denials ; because, though not really under orders, she well knew how much Mr. Rollo had to do with what they termed 'her new kink about dancing.' And even worse than the open charge that she was afraid to disobey, were the covert insinuations that she was anxious to please.

Then (to tell the whole truth) she did very much long for another flight among the gay flags and ribbands which made the German so lively,—she *could* not see the harm! Only she could never have done it with those grey eyes looking on and drawing their own false conclusions about everybody and everything. But to-night he was not on hand: the guests had all arrived long ago, and no guardian in any shape among them. And so, over persuaded by circumstances, and especially by Mr. Nightingale, who made himself rather more than a circumstance, Wych Hazel gave him her hand and went forward to take her place. Under pledge, however, that if any one of the new figures came up she had leave to retire. A burst of applause and congratulation hailed her appearance; and in a very few minutes she had forgotten all but the music and the whirl of intoxication. Even partners sank into insignificance, and became only so many facilities for so much delight. Not so easily could her partners forget her,—the girlish face, sometimes grave with its own enjoyment, and then—'bright as a constellation!'—declared Mr. Simms; the grace of manner which kept its distance well; the diaphonous dress which floated around her like a golden haze; the scarlet flowers in her hair. Never had she danced, never looked, more thoroughly herself.

There are times when we get a lesson from without,—there are others when it must come from within; and Mr. Rollo, who had given the first, was now to see his work finished by the second. Wych Hazel was wrong, he *was* there; but he had come late, and if any of the dancers saw him they kept it hush; so that he looked on at his ward without her knowledge. But it must be

noted as an instance of the perversity of Mr. Rollo's mind, that the more thoroughly he perceived the difference between Wych Hazel and her companions, the less he liked to have her among them; and every point in the dance where she escaped without even a touch upon her modest bearing, as if truly no one dared take liberties with her, made him half wild to get her out of it altogether.

Thus thinking and watching, Mr. Rollo saw two strange things take place. First came this:

A new figure was called, and the partners were to be sorted by means of long streamers of different-coloured ribbands. Wych Hazel, having already received hers, a green, stood drawing it through her fingers and chatting with Josephine Powder, whose ribband was blue. Suddenly Miss Kennedy caught away the blue ribband and began to compare its length with that of her own; measuring and re-measuring, tangling the long ends up together; until as the gentlemen came up to match colours and claim their partners, Wych Hazel hurriedly put the green streamer in Josephine's hand, and went off with Captain Lancaster. The green and blue were such convertible colours in the gaslight that no one took any notice. But Rollo saw that Wych Hazel drew a long breath as she moved away, and looked down, and did not say much for several minutes. That figure passed off with nothing unusual.

Then followed another, during which the couples were arranged in a sort of haphazard way; the ladies and gentlemen drawing up in two long opposite lines, each then to take his *vis-a-vis*. But where a lady was in great demand, the gentleman *not* strictly opposite would sometimes press down and forward, trying to catch her eye, and prove himself her partner by mere right of posses-

sion. The line of men stood with their backs towards Mr. Rollo, so that he did not at first see who it was that started forward so eagerly, taking a fair diagonal towards Miss Kennedy. But he saw her change colour, with a sort of frightened look, and then—most unlike her usual shy bearing,—saw her turn the other way, and herself take a diagonal towards what proved in this instance to be Mr. May. With a great flush of crimson at first, and then growing and remaining very pale, and dancing very languidly. And then, at the foot of the room, her eyes met those of her young guardian,—which about finished up the evening. For twice that night Wych Hazel had been within a hair'sbreadth of having her hand taken by the very man from whose presence she had escaped that night in July. To get rid of him she had put herself off on somebody else, and Mr. Rollo had seen it all!

'Put Molly Seaton in my place, Josephine,' she whispered, 'Mr. May is going to excuse me.'

But they crowded round her and insisted upon 'just one more.' She should not finish this figure if she disliked it,—they would stop it short: anything to keep Miss Kennedy on the floor! Would she dance 'Le Verre de Vin'?

'Never!'—with sudden energy.

'My gracious me!—how spiteful we are!' said Kitty Fisher. '*You* wouldn't have to drink it. Well, then, "La Poursuite"?'

Miss Kennedy hated 'La Poursuite.'

'And—for Miss Kennedy—it is such breathless work,' said Mr. Kingsland.

'And—for Mr. Kingsland—etcetera, etcetera—said Kitty mockingly. 'Stephen, when there is an opportuni-

ty for remarks, I'll let you know. "La Poursuite" is just the thing. You see, Hazel,' she whispered, 'the Viking can rush in and reclaim his prize, and reconciliations take place in the final tour.'

'I shall not dance it, Kitty,' said Wych Hazel steadily, though her cheeks glowed.

'No?' said Miss Fisher. 'Not to the tune of "The king shall enjoy his own again"? Well—what of "Les Mains Mysterieuses"?'

'*I* protest, now,' said Captain Lancaster. 'There cannot be even a pretence of mystery about Miss Kennedy's hand. It is the merest farce.'

'O, you'd like "Le Coussin," and a chance to go down on your knees!' said Miss Fisher, slightly provoked.

'Pardon me!' said Captain Lancaster. 'When I go down on my knees to Miss Kennedy, I shall want no cushion.'

'Good!' said Miss Burr.

'I vow,' said Kitty Fisher, 'you're a lover worth having. But the pretty dear'll get spoiled among you. Come—what will she choose? "Le Miroir!" Nothing to do but look at her own sweet self. Run away, Duchess, and take your seat.'

'Rather stupid, I think,' said Wych Hazel, as she went unwillingly forward,—but she was getting wild, standing there! 'I think I shall take the first one that comes, and save trouble.'

She sat down in front of the long mirror, in which she could see the whole room behind her: everybody in it, and every motion of everybody. But she really saw but one person, and he was motionless. Others, gazing in, had a marvellous pretty picture of golden gauze and

scarlet flowers, and a fair young face from which the gaiety had suddenly died out. The breast of her dress was covered with 'favours;' basket and ring, bell and bouquet, a flag, a rosette, a pair of gloves,—Rollo could not identify all the details of the harlequin crew; but it looked as if Miss Kennedy had been chosen by everybody, every time! She sat still enough now.

'Look up, child!' cried Miss Fisher. 'How do you expect to know who's behind you, if you sit studying your pretty feet upon the floor? You may flirt away an angel, and welcome some gentleman in black who was not invited.'

There was a laugh at this sally; and as several gentlemen sprang eagerly forward, Kitty began to hum—'"This is the maiden all forlorn,"'—but for once Hazel did not listen.

'Flirt somebody away!' she was thinking,—'I should like to see myself doing it! I shall take the very first that comes.'

But alas for good intentions in a bad place! The room was long, and some people were further off, and others close at hand, and the very first that looked over her chair was Mr. Morton! Hazel gave a toss of her handkerchief that half blew him away. And the next —yes, the very next, was the man whom she had been eluding all the evening. This time the hand moved more languidly, and her eyes never looked up, and her cheeks rivalled the scarlet flowers.

'She'll learn,—O, she'll learn!' cried Kitty Fisher. 'Never saw it better done in my life. Such a discriminating touch!'

'Is there anybody else to escape?' thought poor Hazel, her breath coming quick. And then she was so de-

lighted to see Captain Lancaster's pleasant face, that she shewed it in her own; and the gentleman took an amount of encouragement therefrom which by no means belonged to him. He waited upon Miss Kennedy for the rest of that evening with a devotion which everybody saw except herself. No such trifles as a man's devotion got even a passing notice from her. For the girl was feeling desperate. How many times that night had she been betrayed into what she disliked and despised and had said she never would do? If Rollo had not been there, perhaps she would have felt only shame,—as it was, for the time it made her reckless. 'Le Miroir' gave place to other figures, and still Miss Kennedy shewed no second wish to retire and join the lookers-on. But every time the demands of the dance made *her* choose a partner—when it was her woman's right to be chosen! —every time she was passed rapidly from hand to hand without even the poor power of choice, Wych Hazel avenged it on herself by the sharpest silent comments; while to her partners, she was proud, and reserved, and brilliant, and generally 'touch-me-not;' until they too were desperate—with admiration.

If Rollo was half wild in secret he had the power to keep it to himself. His demeanour was composed, and *not* abstracted; his attentions to others, when occasion was, for he did not seek it, as gracefully rendered as usual; he even talked; though through it all it is safe to say he lost nothing of what Wych Hazel was doing. Nobody would have guessed, not in the secret, that he had any particular attraction in that room, or indeed anywhere! He did not approach Wych Hazel to oblige her to notice him; he would not give her the additional annoyance or himself the useless pain.

Yet, though severely tried that night, he was not unreasonably discouraged. He partly read Wych Hazel; or he surmised what was at the bottom of her wild gaiety; and he had a great tenderness for her. A tenderness that made him grave at heart and somewhat grave outwardly; but he did not despair, and he bided his time. He was not irritated that she had broken the bonds of his words, amidst all his profound vexation. He had heard enough of people's tongues, and also knew enough of her, to understand pretty well how it was. He would not even look another remonstrance that night; only, he resolved to stay out the evening and at least see the girl safe in her carriage to go home. He would not go with her either this time.

'Hazel,' whispered Miss Fisher, in one of the figure pauses, 'slip out quietly at the side door when the break-up begins, and we'll have a lark. Stuart says he'll drive me home, if I'll coax you to go along. You can stay with me to-night. We'll go a little before everybody, you know,' she added persuasively, for Hazel hesitated. 'And the Duke need never know.'

Still Hazel was silent, balancing alternatives. Could she bear a *tête-à-tête* drive home with him? Could she escape it in any other way?—She gave Kitty Fisher a little nod, and whirled off in the hands of Mr. May.

But 'Duke' was nearer than they knew, and specially observant of Kitty Fisher's doings. He was not near enough to catch the import of the question or proposal; but his quick ears heard 'side door'—and his eyes saw that Hazel's sign was of assent; and his wits guessed at the meaning of both. A moment's reflection made him certain of his conclusion.

Dane bit his lip at the first flash of this conclusion.

He saw before him again a task which he would have given a great deal to be spared. Both from tenderness and from policy he was exceeding unwilling to thwart Wych Hazel now, most of all in this company, thereby subjecting her to renewed annoyance, inevitable and galling. Yet he never hesitated; and his old hunter's instinct abode with him, that no step which *must* be taken is on the whole a bad step. He left the room before the dance was finished, and was in the lobby when the party he waited for came down the broad staircase, ready for their drive. He did not present himself, but when Wych Hazel had followed Kitty Fisher out of the side door, before which Stuart's equipage stood ready, she heard a very low voice at her side, which low as it was she knew very well.

'Miss Hazel, your carriage is at the other door.'

But Kitty Fisher saw, if she did not hear.

'No room for you,' she said. 'Much as ever to get me in. Good night, Sir Duke, and pleasant dreams. The pleasant realities are all bespoke.'

'Miss Kennedy—' low at Wych Hazel's side.

'One of the aforesaid pleasant realities,' said Kitty, with her hand on Wych Hazel's shoulder. 'Come, Duchess!'

Hazel's words had been all ready, but at this speech they died away. It seemed to her as if her cheeks must light up the darkness!

'Your carriage is in waiting,' Rollo went on, in a calm low tone, which ignored Kitty and everybody else.

Still no word.

'Now come!' said Miss Fisher—'don't you play tyrant yet awhile. She's going home with me. Poor

little Duchess!—daresn't say her soul's her own! What's the matter?—didn't she ask you pretty?'

There was no answer to this. Rollo did not honour her with any attention. Hazel freed her shoulder from Miss Fisher's hand, and turned short about.

'There is no use contesting things,' she said, speaking with an effort which made the words sound hard-edged and abrupt. 'I shall drive home by myself to Chickaree. Good-night.' And without a look right or left, she went up the steps and across the hall into the carriage at the other door.

Rollo saw her in without a word, and turned away.

And Miss Kennedy,—as if her spite against something or somebody was not yet appeased,—began deliberately, one by one, to take the 'favours' off her dress and drop them through the open carriage window upon the road. But, let me say, she was not (like Quickear) laying a clue for herself, by which to find her way back to the 'German.' Never again.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE RUNAWAY.

THE fancy ball at Moscheloo was a brilliant affair. More brilliant perhaps than in the crush and mixed confusion of city society could have been achieved. It is a great thing to have room for display. There were people enough, not too many; and almost all of them knew their business. So there was good dressing and capital acting. The evening would have been a success, even without the charades on which Mme. Lasalle laid so much stress.

Dominoes were worn for the greater amusement; and of course curiosity was busy; but more than curiosity. In the incongruous fashion common to such entertainments, a handsome Turkish janissary drew up to a figure draped in dark serge and with her whole person enveloped in a shapeless mantle of the same, which was drawn over her head and face.

'I have been puzzling myself for the last quarter of an hour,' said he, 'to find out—not who—but *what* you are.'

'Been successful?' said the witch.

'I confess, no. Of course you will not tell me *who* you are; but I beg, who do you pretend to be?'

'O, pretend!' said the witch. I am "a woman that hath a familiar spirit!"'

'Where did you pick up your attendant?'

'Came at my call. I suppose you have heard of Endor?'

'Have I? En—dor? Where *have* I heard that name? It is no place about here. 'Pon my honour, I forget.'

'In the East?' suggested the witch.

'Stupid!—I know; you are the very person I want to see. But first I wish you would resolve an old puzzle of mine—Did you bring up Samuel, honestly?—or was it all smoke?'

'Smoke proves fire.'

'Samuel would not have been in the fire.'

'He would if it was necessary,' said the witch. 'Whom do you want brought up, Mr. Nightingale?'

'Ha!' said the janissary. 'How do you know that? But perhaps you are "familiar" with everybody. Bring up Miss Kennedy!'

'Very well,' said the witch, beginning to walk slowly round him. 'But as it is not certain that Saul saw Samuel, I suppose it will not matter whether you see her?'

'It matters the whole of it! I want to see her of course. There is nobody else, in fact, whom I want to see; nor anybody else worth seeing after her. The rarest, brightest, most distracting vision that has ever been seen west of your place.'

'If there is nobody worth seeing after, you had better see everybody else first,' said the witch, pausing in her round.

'You have a familiar spirit. Tell me what she thinks about me; will you?'

The witch threw up a handful of sweet pungent dust into the air, and made another slow round about the janissary.

'Neither black nor white,'— she said oracularly; 'neither yellow nor blue; neither pea-green nor delicate mouse-grey.'

'I?' said Stuart. 'Or what?'

'Either. Both.'

The janissary laughed somewhat uneasily. Just then a knight, extremely well got up in the habiliments of the 13th century, stepped near and accosted the witch in a confidential tone.

'Everybody here, I suppose, is known to you. Pray who is that very handsome, very *decolletée*, lady from the court of Charles the Second? Upon my word! she does it well.'

'That is Miss Fisher.'

'Well, if women knew!'— said the knight slowly. It was evident he thought himself speaking to safe ears, probably not handsome enough to be displayed. 'If they knew!' he repeated. 'Does she not do it well?'

'Does she?' said the witch. 'I was not in England just then.'

'Don't you wish you had been! It's a very fair show,' —continued the knight as he looked. 'We ought to be much obliged to the lady. Really, she leaves—nothing —to be desired! If you please, merely as a subject of curiosity, from what part of the world and time does yonder figure come? the broad-brimmed hat?'

The figure was a very fine one, by the way. His dress was a quaintly-cut suit of dark blue cloth, the edges bound with crimson, and fastened with silver buttons.

White fine thread stockings were tied at the knee with crimson riband, and silver buckles were in his shoes.

'You must know,' said the witch, 'that there are several parts of the world from which I have been banished.'

'In an æsthetic point of view, I should say the edict was justified,' returned the knight, surveying the bale of brown serge before him. He passed on, and the man in the blue cloth presently took his place.

'They tell me you are a witch,' said he, speaking in rather a low tone; 'and as you see, I am a countryman. Will you have the goodness to explain to me—I suppose you understand it—what all these people are?'

'They are people who for the present find their happiness in being other people,' said the witch, with a grave voice, in which however a laugh was somewhat imperfectly muffled. 'Like yourself, sir.'

'Like me? Quite the contrary. I was never more myself, I assure you. For that very reason I find myself not at home. Excuse my curiosity. Why, if you please, do they seek their happiness out of themselves, as it were, in this way?'

'Well,' said the witch confidentially, 'to tell you the truth, *I* don't know. You see I am in your predicament, and was never more myself.'

'But I thought you had a familiar spirit? I have read so much as that.'

'At your service'—said the witch.

'Then be so good as to enlighten me. I see a moving kaleidoscope view of figures—it's very pretty—but why are they all here?'

'Some because they were invited,' said the witch critically. 'And doubtless some because others were. And a good many for fun —and a few for mischief.'

'Is it the custom in this country to make mischief one of the pleasures of society?'

'Yes!' said the witch with some emphasis. 'And to tell you the truth again, that is just one of the points in which society might be improved.'

'But how do fun and mischief go along together?'

'Well, that depends,' said the witch. 'The wrong sort of mischief spoils the right sort of fun.'

'And does that often happen, among such well-dressed people as these?'

'O, where is her Grace?'—cried a gay voice in the distance. 'I've sworn to find her.'

The witch was silent a moment, then answered slowly, 'It happens—quite often.'

'Can people find nothing pleasanter to do with their time,' said the countryman, 'than to spend it in mischief? or in fun which the mischief spoils? These things you tell me sound very strange in my ears.'

'The right sort of mischief *is* fun,—and the right sort of fun is *not* mischief,' she said impatiently. 'And what people find in the wrong sorts, I don't know!'

'By the way,' said the countryman, 'how come *you* to be here? How did you escape, when Saul killed all the rest of the witches?'

'It is queer, isn't it?' she said. 'Wouldn't you have supposed I should be the first one to fall?'

'And in this country, are you using your experience to make or to mend mischief?'

'Make all I can! Are there any Sauls on hand, do you think?'

'Pray, what sort of man would you characterize by that name?'

'Well,' said she of Endor with again the hidden laugh

in her voice, 'some men have a hidden weakness for witches which conflicts with their duty,—and some men don't!'

'I hope I am not a Saul, then,' said the countryman laughing, though softly; 'but in any case you are safe to take my arm for a walk round the rooms. I should like to see all that is to be seen; and perhaps you could help me to understand.'

It was not a more incongruous pair than were to be seen in many parts of the assembly. The beauty of Charles the Second's court was flirting with Rob Roy; a lady in the wonderful ruff of Elizabeth's time talked with a Roman toga; a Franciscan monk with bare feet gesticulated in front of a Swiss maiden; as the Witch of Endor sauntered through the rooms on the arm of nobody knew exactly what countryman.

'Your prejudices must be very often shocked here,' said the countryman with a smothered tone of laughter again. 'Or, I beg pardon!—has a witch any prejudices, seeing she can have no gravity?'

'What does prejudice mean in your country?'

'Much the same, I am afraid, that it does elsewhere. What are we coming to?'

Passing slowly through the rooms, they had arrived at the great saloon, at one end of which large folding doors opened into another and smaller apartment. This smaller room was hung with green baize; candelabra shed gentle light upon it from within the doors, so placed as not to be seen from the principal room; and over the folding doors was hung a thick red curtain; rolled up now.

'What is all this?'

'O, if you wait a while,' said the witch, 'you will see further transformations—that is all.'

'And what is *this* for?' said the countryman, pointing to the rolled-up red curtain.

'To hide the transformed, till they are ready to be seen.'

'But it does not hide anything,' said the countryman obtusely. 'How do they get it down?'

He went examining about the door-posts, with undoubted curiosity, till he found the mechanism attached to the curtain and touched the spring. Down fell the red folds in an instant. The man drew it up again, and let it fall again, and again drew it up.

'Very good,' he said approvingly. 'Very good. We have no such clever curtains in my country. That will do very well.'

As he spoke, a bell sounded through the house. Immediately the witch escaped by a side door. Two or three others followed her; and then the rest of the company began to pour in and fill the saloon before the red curtain.

'Well, I never *was* so stupid in all my life!' said the court beauty. 'I might have *known* no other girl would come as a roll of serge!'

'And I might have known, that if I failed to recognize Miss Kennedy's hand, it could be only because it was out of sight,' said Mr. Kingsland, who by special favour wore only his own face and dress.

'You'll get a mitten from her hand—and a slap in it, if you don't look out,' said the lady.

'Better a mitten from that hand than a glove from any other,' replied Mr. Kingsland with resignation.

'Easier for you to get,' the beauty retorted. But did you hear of the fun we had the other night?—the best joke! We all put Seaton up to it, and he carried it off well. Dick wouldn't. Before the dancing began, he went up to Miss Kennedy and asked her with his gravest face whether she felt guardian's orders to be binding? And she coloured all up, like a child as she is, and inquired who wanted to know? So Seaton bowed down to the ground almost, and said he—

'"I had the honour of asking Mr. Rollo this afternoon, concerning the drive we spoke of; and he gave me an emphatic no. And now I am come to you to reverse the decision."

'Well, you should have seen her face!—and "*What* did he say, Major Seaton?" she asked. "As near as I can remember," said Seaton with another bow, "he said, Sir, I cannot possibly allow Miss Kennedy to take any such drive as you propose!"'

'Well?—' said Mr. Kingsland,—'I have heavy wagers out on Miss Kennedy's dignity.'

'I don't know what you call dignity,' said the beauty, —'I didn't know at first but she would knock him down for his information,—she did, with her eyes. And then my lady Duchess drew herself up as grand as could be, and answered just as if she didn't care a snap,—"Did Mr. Rollo say that, Major Seaton? Then I certainly shall not go."'

Mr. Kingsland clapped his hands softly. 'Safe yet,' he said. 'But where did Kitty pick up that name for her?' he added, turning to his next neighbour. 'You are in the way of such titles.'

'Kitty won't tell,' the lady answered, an elaborate Queen Elizabeth. 'Not at present. She found out no-

body understood, but Miss Kennedy does, so now she holds it over Miss Kennedy's head that she *will* tell. That is the way she got her before the glass the other night.'

'The tenderness these gentle creatures have for each other!' said Mr. Kingsland.

Meantime a bustling crowd had been pouring in and filling the saloon, and there began to be a cry for silence. The curtain was down; by whom dropped no one knew; but now it was raised again by the proper attendants, and the sight of the cool green little stage brought people to their good behaviour. The silence of expectancy spread through the assembly.

Behind the scenes there was a trifle of delay.

'My dear child,' Mme. Lasalle whispered to the *ci-devant* witch of Endor, 'Mr. Lasalle is in no condition to act with you as he promised. Ill; really ill, you know. We must take some one else. Standing about with bare feet don't agree with his constitution. It won't matter.'

'It matters very much!' said Wych Hazel. 'O, well—just leave that charade out. There are enough more.'

'Indeed there are not!' exclaimed her hostess. 'We cannot spare this. Indeed I doubt if any other will be worth presenting after it. My dear, it makes no difference! and you are ready, and Stuart is ready, and the people are waiting. You must not fail me at the pinch, Hazel. Go on and do your very prettiest, for my sake.'

'Not with Mr. Nightingale. I will have little Jemmy Seaton, then. He is tall enough.'

'He couldn't do it. Nonsense, my dear! you don't mean that there is anything *serious* in it? It is only a play, and a short one too; and Stuart will be, privately, a great improvement on Mr. Lasalle, who wouldn't have

done it with spirit enough ; as why should he ? Come, go on ! Stuart is not worse to play with than another, is he ? Come ! there's Mr. Brandevin waiting for you. He's capital !'

There was no time to debate the matter ; no time to make further changes ; everybody was waiting ; Miss Kennedy had to yield.

The first act was on this fashion. An old man in the blouse of a Normandy peasant sat smoking his pipe. Enter to him his daughter, a lovely peasant girl ; Wych Hazel to wit. The father spoke in French ; the daughter mingled French and English in her talk very prettily. There was some dumb show of serving him ; and then the old man got up to go out, charging his daughter in the severest manner to admit no company in his absence. Scarcely is he gone, when enter on the other side a smart young man in the same peasant dress. Words here were not audible. In dumb show the young man made protestations of devotion, begged for his mistress's hand and kissed it with great fervour ; and appeared to be carrying on a lively suit to the damsel. Now nothing could have been prettier than the picture and the pantomime. Stuart kept his face away from the audience ; Wych Hazel was revealed, and in the coy, blushing maidenly dignity and confusion which suited the character and occasion, was a tableau worth looking at. Well looked at, and in deep silence of the company ; till suddenly the growling old French father is heard coming back again. The peasant starts to his feet, the girl sits down in terror.

'What shall I do ?' he cries, and she echoes,—'What shall he do ? What shall he do ?'

Then came confused answers from the spectators:—

'Bolt, old fellow!'—'Escape!'—'Fly!'—'Run!'—and the last word being taken up and re-echoed, 'Run! run!'—he *did* run; ran out and then ran in and across the stage again; finally out of sight; and drop the curtain. The burst of applause was tremendous.

'You'll have to go on, you know, if that keeps up,' said Stuart behind the scenes; 'and I don't wonder. Here, Mr. Brandevin, go in and stop them!'

The next scene was also very well done. The old French gentleman was alone, and had it all to perform by himself. He began with calling his daughter, in various discordant keys, and with such a variety of impatient and exasperated intonation, that the whole room was full of laughter. His daughter not appearing nor answering, he next instituted a make-believe search for her, feigning to go into the kitchen, the buttery, her bedroom. Not finding her, and making a great deal of amusement for the spectators by the way, he at last comes back and asks in a deploring tone, 'Where is she?'

Cries of 'Off!'—'Gone!'—'Sloped!'—'Away!' were such a medley that nobody professed to be able yet to make out the word. The curtain fell again.

'You are very stupid,' said Mme. Lasalle. 'It is as plain as possible.'

'It will be, when we see the rest,' said somebody. 'No, I don't think it is, either.'

For as he spoke, the curtain rose upon an old clergyman, busy with his books at a table with a lamp. He had a wig, and looked very venerable indeed. Presently to him comes, after a knock, his servant woman.

'Please, sir, here's a young couple wantin' to see ye It's the old story, I expect.'

'Let them come, Sarah—let them come in!' says the old clergyman; 'the old story is the newest of all! Let them come,—but first help me on with my gown. So! —now you may open the door.'

Enter the old peasant's daughter and her lover. The latter confers with the old clergyman, who wheezes and puffs and is quite fussy; finally bids them stand before him in the proper position. The proper position, of course, brings the two young people to face the audience, while the old clergymen's back was a little turned to them, and no loss.

Now the dislike with which Miss Kennedy had received the change of companions in this charade by no means lessened as the play went on. The first scene had annoyed her, the minute she had time to think it over during the solo of the second; and now finding herself face to face with ideas as well as people,—ideas that were not among her familiars,—was very disagreeable; all the more that Mr. Nightingale had contrived to infuse rather more spirit into his part of the performance than was absolutely needful. Wych Hazel looked unmistakeably disturbed, and her eyes never quitted the ground. The audience, quite failing to catch her mood, only applauded.

'Capital!' said General Merrick. 'Positively capital! If it was a real case, and she in momentary expectation of her father, she might look just so.'

'Or if she had accidentally escaped with the wrong person,' said Captain Lancaster, who would have rather preferred to be in Mr. Nightingale's position himself.

'No,' said one of the ladies, 'she is not afraid,—what is she?'

'She is Wych Hazel,' said Mr. Kingsland. 'Do you

see what a breath came then? Not complimentary to Nightingale—but he can find somebody else to turn his head.'

Meanwhile, they all standing so, the old clergyman began his office.

'Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?' he demanded audibly enough. And Stuart's reply came clear—

'I will.'

'Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?'

He had turned towards the pretty peasant girl who stood there with her eyes cast down, and expectation was a-tiptoe. Before the eyes were lifted, and before an answer could be returned, another actor came upon the scene. The countryman who wore the dark blue cloth bound with crimson, stepped into the group from his place at the side of the curtain. He wore his broad-brimmed hat, but removed his domino as he came upon the stage. Yet he stood so that the audience were not in position to see his face. They heard his voice.

'There is a mistake here,' he said with an excellent French accent on his English. This lady is a—what you call—she has no power to dispose of herself.'

The clergyman looked somewhat doubtful and astonished; he had not been prepared for this turn of the play; but it was all in keeping, the interruption came naturally, quietly; he had to meet it accordingly. Stuart's face darkened; he knew better; nevertheless for him too there was but one thing possible, to go on and play the play. His face was all in keeping, too. The anger of the one and the doubt of the other actor were all proper to the action and only helped the effect.

'Diable! what do you want here?' the young peasant exclaimed.

'What is all this, sir? what is this?' said the old minister. 'What do you here, sir?'

'I come for the lady.'

'The lady don't want to see you, you fool!' exclaimed Stuart. 'You needn't think it.'

'What authority have you here, sir, to interfere with my office?' demanded the clergyman.

'Monsieur'—said the countryman hesitating, 'Monsieur knows. This young girl is young—I represent the guardians of her. She is minor; she has no property, nor no power to marry herself; she has nothing at all. She has run away. Monsieur sees. Come, you runaway!' he went on, advancing lightly to where the young girl stood. 'Come with me! She has run away; there is no marriage to-day, sir,' he added with a touch of his hat to the old clergyman. And then, taking Wych Hazel's hand and putting it on his arm he walked her out of the room. It was not as it was a few evenings ago; her hand was taken in earnest now and held, and she was obliged to go as she was led. In the little apartment which served as a green-room there were one or two attendants. Rollo walked past them with a steady, swift step which never stayed nor allowed his companion to stop, until he reached the ladies' dressing-room. It was entirely empty now. The very servants had gathered where they could see the play. Here Rollo released his charge.

The first thing she did was to seat herself on the nearest chair and look up at him. Her first words were peculiar.

'If I could give you the least idea, Mr. Rollo, how

exceedingly disagreeable it is to have my hand taken in that way, it is possible—I am not sure—but it is *possible*, you would not do it. Your hands are so strong!' she said, looking down at the little soft things in her lap. 'And my strength is not practised.'

He looked grave, but spoke very gently, bending towards her as if also considering the little hands.

'Did I act so well?' said he. 'You see that was because there was so much earnest in it.'

'What made you do it?—is everything forbidden unless I ask leave?'

'Do you want to know why I did it?'

'I did not like the play, either,' she said,—'and I did not expect—part of it. But I had promised, and straight through was the quickest way out. It would have done—everybody—too much honour to make a fuss.'

'I did nobody any honour, and I made no fuss,' said Rollo, in his old quaint fashion. 'And my way was the very quickest way out for you.'

She jumped up, with a queer little inarticulate answer, that covered all his statements.

'There will be a fuss, if I do not find a quick way back among those people,' she said, passing round him to the door. Then paused with her hand on the knob considering something.

'Why did you do it, Mr. Rollo?'

'I will try to explain, as soon as I get an opportunity. One word,' he added, detaining her,—'Laugh it off as far as you can, down stairs, as part of the play.'

'Easy to do,' said the girl with some emphasis. 'Unfortunately I do not feel at all like laughing. If you had done *me* a little honour, sir, it would have been needless.'

She went first to the small dressing-room down stairs, catching up her serge and muffling herself in it once more, so that not a thread of her peasant's dress appeared ; then went silently in among the crowd, a very sober witch indeed. It was a little while before she was molested. By and by, while another charade was engaging people's interest, Mme. Lasalle worked round to the muffled figure.

'My dear,' she whispered, 'who was that?'

'One of your dominoes, Madame. Acted with a good deal of spirit, didn't you think so?'

'Magnifique! But that was none of *my* dominoes. My dear, you will never know how lovely your representation was. But, that interruption was no part of our play, as we had planned it. How came it? Who was it? Somebody who made play to suit himself? How came it, Hazel?'

'Just what I have been trying to find out,' said the girl. 'I shall not rest till I do.' But she moved off then, and kept moving, and was soon too well taken possession of for many questions to reach her. All of her audience but two or three, took the interruption for part of the play, and were loud in their praises. Hearing and not hearing, muffled in thoughts yet more than in serge, as an actor or spectator the Witch of Endor saw the charades through, and played with her supper, and finally went out to her carriage and the dark world of night. For there was no moon this time, and stars are uncertain things.

As Stuart Nightingale came back from putting her into the carriage, he encountered his aunt.

'Well!' he said in an impatient voice, smothered as it was, 'that job's all smoke.'

'Who was it?'

'That infernal meddler, of course.'

'Rollo?'

'Who else would have dared?'

'How did he get in?'

'That you ought to know better than I. It was no fault of mine.'

'Rollo!' said Mme. Lasalle. 'And I thought I had cleverly kept him out. The tickets were not transferable. Did *she* let him in?'

'Not she. No doing of hers, nor liking, I promise you. I think he has settled his own business, by the way. But we can't try this on a second time, Aunt Victorine. Confound him!'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN A FOG.

HAZEL was accompanied to her carriage of course, as usual. But when she was shut in, she heard an unwelcome voice saying to her coachman, 'Drive slowly, Reo; the night is very dark;' and immediately the carriage door was opened again, and the speaker took his seat beside her; without asking leave this time. A passing glare from the lamps of another carriage shewed her head and hands down on the window-sill, in the way she had come from Greenbush. Neither head nor hands stirred now.

Her companion was silent and let her be still, until the carriage had moved out of the Moscheloo grounds and was quietly making its way along the dark high road. Lamps flung some light right and left from the coach box; but within the darkness was deep. The reflection from trees and bushes, the gleam of fence rails, the travelling spots of illumination in the road, did not much help matters there.

'Miss Hazel,' said Rollo,—and he spoke, though very quietly, with a sort of breath of patient impatience,—'I have come with you to-night because I could not let you drive home alone such a dark night, and because

I have something to say to you which will not bear to wait a half-hour longer. Can you listen to me?'

'I am listening, sir,' she said, again in a sort of dull passiveness. 'May I keep this position? I think I must be tired.'

'Are you very angry with me?' he asked gently.

'No,' she said in the same tone. 'I believe not. I wish I could get angry with people. It is the easiest way.'

'If you are not angry, give me your hand once more.'

'Are we to execute any further gyrations?'

'Give it to me, and we will see.'

Rather hesitatingly, one white glove came from the window-sill, within his reach.

'You are a queer person!' she said. 'You will neither give orders nor make me execute them, without having hold of my hand! Are you keeping watch of my pulse, so as to stop in time?'

He made no answer to that, nor spoke at all immediately. His hand closed upon the little white glove, and keeping it so, he presently said gravely,

'You and I ought to be good friends, Hazel, on several accounts;—because your father and mother were good friends of mine,—and because I love you very dearly.'

A slight motion on her part,—he could not tell whether she started, or what it was,—changed instantly to a breathless stillness. Only for a timid stir of the hand, as if it meant to slip away unnoticed. But it was held too firmly for that.

'I don't know whether you know yet,' he went on after a slight pause, 'what it is to love anybody very dearly. I remember you told Gyda one day that you had never loved any one so since your mother. Certainly I have never had a right to flatter myself that *I*

had been able to teach you what it means. If I am mistaken,—tell me.'

'Easy work!'—she might have answered again,—to tell him what she had never told herself. And particularly nice of him to choose such a place for his inquiries, where there was no possible way of exit (for her) but the coach window. What had he never tried to teach her, except to mind? And of course *she* never knew anything about—anything! But there Hazel shifted her ground, and felt herself growing frightened, and certainly wished her new guardian a hundred miles away. What did he mean?—was he only sounding her, as Mr. Falkirk did sometimes? If so, he might just find out for himself!—With which clear view of the case, Wych Hazel set her foot (mentally) on all troublesome possibilities, and sat listening to hear her heart beat; and wondered how many statements of fact Mr. Rollo was going to make, and at what point in the list truth would oblige her to start up and confront him?

He had paused a little, to give room for the answer he did not expect. Seeing it came not, with a slight hastily drawn breath he went on again.

'In the mean time you have heard what you never ought to have heard,—or not for a long time; and through the same good agency other people have heard it too; and you are placed in a position almost to hate the sight of me, and shrink from the sound of my name; and you are looking upon your father's will as binding you to a sort of slavery. I am not going to stand this a minute longer.

'Hazel— unless you can love me dearly, my privileges as guardian would be of no use to me. I would not take advantage of them if I could. I would not have

you on any other terms. And I certainly am not going to be a clog upon your happiness. I have made up my mind to keep my office, nominally, for one year; practically I mean to leave you very much to Mr. Falkirk. I will keep it for a year. At the end of the year, you shall tell me whether I shall give it up or keep it longer. But if longer, it will be for ever. And I warn you, if you give it to me then, it will be a closer and sweeter guardianship than you have had yet, Hazel. I will keep what I love, so dearly and absolutely as I love her. But I shall not speak to you again on this subject until the year's end. You need not be afraid. I mean to see you and to let you see me; but you will hear no more about this till the time comes.'

No answer, even then, only the trembling of the little hand. Dark as it was, she turned her head yet more away, laying her other cheek upon the window.

'Are we friends now?' he said somewhat lower.

'Mr. Rollo'—she began. But the tremor had found its way to the girl's voice, and she broke off short.

'Well?' said he. 'That is one of the parties. I meant, Mr. Rollo and Hazel.'

'Be quiet!' she said impatiently,—'and let me speak.' But what Hazel wanted to say, did not immediately appear.

He answered by a clasp of her hand, and waited.

'I am quiet,'—he suggested at length.

The girl made a desperate effort, and lifted up her head, and sat back in her place, to answer; but managing her voice very much like spun glass, which might give way in the using; and evidently choosing her words with great care, every now and then just missing the wrong one.

'You go on making statements,' she said, catching her breath, 'and I—have taken up none of them, because I cannot,—because if,—I mean, I have let them *all* pass, Mr. Rollo.'—If truth demanded a greater sacrifice just then, it could not be because this one was small.

'I know,' he answered. 'Will you do better now? What mistake has your silence led me into, or left me in?'

'I said nothing about mistakes. And I always do as well as I can at first,' said Hazel, with a touch of the same impatience.

'My statements did not call for an answer. But I am going to say some other things to which I do want an answer. Shall I go on?'

'You know what they are,' she said.

'I want you,' he went on, speaking slowly and deliberately, 'to give me your promise that you will not waltz any more until the year is out that I spoke of.'

She answered presently, speaking in a measured sort of way, 'That is one thing. The other?'

'I want your promise to this first.'

'Suppose I am not ready to give it?'

'I ask for it, all the same.'

Again she sorted her words.

'Well then—I am not ready,—I mean, not willing. And do not you see—at least, I mean, you do not see—how—unreasoning a request it is?' The adjective gave her some trouble.

'Not unreasonable?'

'I said nothing about reasonable.'

'No. But I must have your promise. If you knew the world better, it would not be necessary for me to make the request; I know that; but the fact that you are—

simple as a wild lily,—does not make me willing to see the wild lily lose any of its charm. Neither will I, Hazel, as long as I have the care of it. So long as you are even in idea mine, no man shall—touch you, again, as I saw it last night! You are precious to me beyond such a possibility. Give me your promise.'

'You shall not talk to me so!' she cried, shrinking off in the old fashion. 'I will not let you! You have done it before. And I tell you that I never—touch anybody—except with the tip end of my glove!'

'No more than the wild lily does. But, Hazel, no one shall *touch the lily*, while I have care of it!' He spoke in the low tone of determination. Hazel did not answer.

'Promise me!' he said again, when he found that she was silent.

'By your own shewing it is hardly needed,' she said. 'I suppose obedience will do as well.'

'Let it be a matter of grace, not of obligation.'

'There is some grace in obedience. Why do you want a promise?'

'To make the matter certain. Else you may be tempted, or cajoled, into what—if you knew better—you would never do. You will know better by and by, Meanwhile I stand in the way. Come! give me the promise!'

There was a little bit of a laugh at that, saying various things.

'I shall not be cajoled,' she said. 'But I will not make promises.'

'How then will you make me secure, that what I do not wish shall not be done?'

'It is not a matter about which I am anxious, sir,' said Miss Wych coolly.

'I am not anxious,' he said very quietly, 'because one way or another I will be secure. Do you think I can hold you in my heart as I do, and suffer other men to approach you as I saw it last night? Never again, Hazel!'

Dead silence on the lady's part; this 'mixed-up' style of remark being, as she found, extremely hard to answer.

'What shall I do?' he said gently.

'About what, sir?'

'Making myself secure?'

'I do not know,' said Wych Hazel. 'No suggestion occurs to me that would be worth your consideration.'

'I spoke to you once, some time ago, on the abstract grounds of the question we have under discussion. These, being only a wild lily, you did not comprehend. You do not love me, or you would give me my promise fast enough on other grounds. You leave me a very difficult way. You leave me no way but to take measures to remove you from temptation. Is not that less pleasant, Hazel, than to give me the promise?'

'She was silent for several minutes; not pondering the question, but fighting the pain. To be *forced* into anything,—to have *him* take that tone with her!'—

'How will you do it?' she said.

He hesitated and then answered gently,

'You need not ask me that. You will not make it necessary.'

'Not ask?' said Wych Hazel rousing up. 'Of course I ask! Do you expect to frighten me off my feet with a mere impersonal "it"?'—Then with a laugh which somehow told merely of pain, she added: 'You might cut short my allowance, and stint me in slippers,—only that unfortunately the allowance is a fixed fact.'

'I did not mean to threaten,' he said in a voice that certainly spoke of pain on his own part. 'Is it so much to promise, Hazel?'

'You did do it, however,' said the girl,—'but we will pass that. Everything is "much" to promise. And why I refuse, Mr. Rollo, is not the question. But it seems to me, that while my father might command me, on my allegiance, to give such a promise, no delegated authority of his can reach so far. I may find myself mistaken.'

'Do me justice,' he said. 'I did not command a promise; I sued for it. The protection the promise was to throw around you, I will secure in other ways if I must. But do not forget, Hazel, *why* I do it.'

'I do not believe you know,' said the girl excitedly. '"Wild lilies?"—why, even wild elephants are not usually required to tie their own knots. What comes next? I should like to have the whole, if possible, before I get home—which seems likely to be about breakfast time.'

'Reo is driving as fast as he ought to drive, such a night. What do you mean by "what comes next"?'

'You said, I thought, you had several things to speak of.'

'I remember. I was going to ask you to go to see Gyda sometimes.'

'That is already disposed of—if I am to be allowed to go nowhere,' said Hazel, with a rush of pain which very nearly got into her voice. 'The next, Mr. Rollo?'

"I think, nothing next. You know,' he went on, speaking half lightly, and yet with a thread of tender persuasion in his voice, 'you know that next year you can dispose of me. Seeing that in the mean while you cannot help yourself, would it not be better to give me the

assurance that for this year you will forego the waltz? and let things go on as they are? Field mice always make the best of circumstances.'

'All summer,' she answered, 'you have not even taken the trouble to forbid me! And now, forbidding will not do, but you must use threats. They might at least wait until I had disobeyed.'

'That is a very distant view of me indeed!' said Rollo. 'Details are lost. I will get you a lorgnette the next time I go anywhere.'

'You had better,' said Hazel, not stopping to weigh her words this time, 'for such distance does not lend enchantment.'—After which the silence on her part became rather profound.

'No,' said Rollo dryly, 'I see it does not. What will you do by and by, when you are sorry for having treated me so this evening?'

'I daresay I shall find out when the time comes.'—

She leaned her head back against the carriage, wanting dreadfully to get home, and put it down, and think. She could not think with her hand held fast in that fashion,—and she could not get it away, without making a fuss and so drawing attention to the fact that it was not in her own keeping. One or two slight efforts in that direction had been singularly fruitless. So she sat still, puzzling over questions which have perplexed older heads than hers. As, how you can have a thing given you, and yet not seem to possess it,—and why people cannot say words to give you pleasure, without at once adding others to give you pain. What had she done? Mr. Falkirk would have thought her a miracle of obedience these last two nights; she even wondered at herself. How she had enjoyed her home this summer!—it

seemed to her that she loved every leaf upon every tree. What could he mean by 'remove'? And here a long, deep sigh so nearly escaped her lips, that she sat up again in sudden haste, erect as before; but feeling unmistakably lonely, and just a little bit forlorn.

Perhaps her companion's thoughts had come on one point near to hers; for he gently put the little white glove back upon her lap and left it there. His words went back to her last ones, though after a minute's interval.

'It will come,' he said confidently. 'All the field nice of my acquaintance are true and tender. *When* it comes, Hazel, will you do me justice?'

She stirred uneasily, and once or twice essayed to speak, and did not make it out. This way of taking things for granted, and on such made ground laying out railroads and running trains, was very confusing. Hazel felt as if the air were full of mistakes, and none of them within her reach. When at last she did speak, plainly she had laid hold of the easiest. The words came out abruptly, but in one of her sweet bird-like tones.

'Mr. Rollo—I am not the least imaginable bit like a field mouse!'

'In what respect?'

'These nice, tender people that you know'—she went on. 'I believe I am true.'

It might have been some pressure of the latter fact, that made her go on after a moments pause; catching her breath a little, as if to go on was very disagreeable, speaking quick and low; correcting herself here and there.

'I wish you would stop saying—all sorts of things, Mr. Rollo. Because they are not true. Some of them. And—I do not understand you. Sometimes. And I do

not know what you mean by my doing you justice. Because — I always did — I think, — and I have not "treated you," at all, to-night.'

With which Hazel leaned head and hands down upon the window again, and looked out into the dark night. Would they ever get home?—But it was impossible to drive faster. A thick fog filled the air, and it was intensely dark.

'I have been telling you that I love you. That you do not quite understand. I am bound not to speak on the subject again for a whole year. But supposing that in the meantime you should come to the understanding of it,—and suppose you find out that I have given field mice a just character;—will you do me the justice to let me find it out? And in the meantime,—we shall be at Chickaree presently,—perhaps you will give me, in a day or two, the assurance I have begged of you, and not drive me to extremities.'

'Very well!' she said, raising her head again,—'if you will have it in that shape! But the worth of an insignificant thing depends a little upon the setting, and the setting of my refusal was much better than the setting of my compliance. There is no grace whatever about this. And take notice, sir, that if you had gone to "extremities," you would have driven yourself. I always have obeyed, and always should. But I give the promise!'—and her head went down again, and her eyes looked straight out into the fog.

He said 'Thank you!' earnestly, and he said no more. There is no doubt but he felt relieved; at the same time there is no doubt but Mr. Rollo was a mystified man. That her compliance had no grace about it was indeed manifest enough; the grace of her refusal

was further to seek. He deposited the little lady of Chickaree at her own door with no more words than a 'good-night;' and went the rest of his way in the fog alone. And if Wych Hazel had suffered some annoyance that evening, her young guardian was not without his share of pain. It was rather sharp for a time, after he had parted from her. Had the work of these weeks, and of his revealed guardianship, and of his exercise of office, driven her from him entirely? He looked into the question, as he drove home through the fog.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DODGING.

IT was no new thing for the young lady of Chickaree to come home late, and dismiss her attendants, and put herself to bed ; neither was it uncommon for her to sleep over breakfast time in such cases, and take her coffee afterwards in Mrs. Bywank's room alone. But when the fog had cleared away, the morning after Mme. Lasalle's ball, and the sun was riding high, and still no signs of Miss Wych, then Mrs. Bywank went to her room. And the good housekeeper was much taken aback to find peasant dress and grey serge curled down together in a heap on the floor, and Miss Wych among them, asleep with her head in a chair. Perhaps that in itself was not so much ; but the long eyelashes lay wet and heavy upon her cheek, —and Mrs. Bywank knew that token of old.

I am afraid some hard thoughts about Mr. Rollo disturbed her mind, as she stood there looking. What use had he made of his ticket to distress her darling?—she such a mere child, and he with his mature twenty-five years? But Mrs. Bywank did not dare to ask, even when the girl stirred and woke and rose up ; though the ready flush, and the unready eyes, and the grave mouth, went to her very heart. She noted, too, that her young

lady went into no graphic descriptions of the ball, as was her wont; but merely bade Phœbe take away the two fancy dresses, and ensconced herself in a maze of soft white folds, and then went and knelt down by the open window; leaning her elbows there, and her chin on her hands. Mrs. Bywank waited.

'Miss Wych,' she began after a while,—'my dear, you have had no breakfast.'

'I want none.'

'But you will have some lunch?'

'No.'

'My dear,—you must,' said Mrs. Bywank. 'You will be sick, Miss Wych.'

'Don't *you* say "must" to me, Byo!' said the girl impetuously. But then she started up and flung her arms round Mrs. Bywank and kissed her, and said, 'Come, let's have some lunch, then!'—giving half-a-dozen orders to Phœbe as she went along. But the minute lunch was over, Wych Hazel stepped into her carriage and drove away. Not the landau this time, though the September day was fair and soft; neither was the young lady arrayed in any wise for paying visits; her white cloud of morning muslin and lace, her broad gipsy hat, and gauntlets caught up and carried in her hand, not put on,— so she bestowed herself in the close carriage which generally she used only by night. And the low-spoken orders to Reo were, to take her a road she had never been, and drive till she told him to stop. Then she threw herself back against the cushions, and buried her face in her hands, and tried to think.

If *that* was to leave her 'practically to Mr. Falkirk,' her knowledge of English was somewhat deficient. And if belonging to somebody merely 'in idea' had such

results !—but she was shy of the 'idea,' blushing over it there all by herself as she pushed it away. She was disappointed, there was no doubt about that. Foiled of her plan, over which she had pleased herself; for she had intended to give a 'no' instead of a 'yes' at the right place in the charade, to the discomfiture of all parties ;—curbed by a strong hand, which she never could bear; hurt and sorrowful that nobody would trust her with even the care of her own womanhood.

'I wonder what there is about me?' she cried to herself, with two or three indignant tears rushing up unbidden. 'As if I had not had a sharper lesson the other night than any *he* could give!'—No, not quite that; the sharpest dated further back; but this would have been enough of itself. And what else was she to do or not do?—she took down her hands, and crossed them, and looked at them as she had done before the picture of the 'loss of all things.' These bonds did not feel like those; she did not like them, none the less;—and—she wondered what was his idea of *close* guardianship? And had he made any misstatements?—Reo drove on and on, till his practised eye saw that to get home by tea-time was all that was left, and then stopped and got permission to turn round.

But driving seemed to have become a sudden passion with Miss Wych. She kept herself out, somewhere, somehow, day after day; denied of course to all visitors, and of small avail to Mr. Falkirk, except to pour out his coffee. Miss Kennedy was in danger of creating a new excitement; being always out and yet never visible; for one entertainment after another went by, and brought only her excuses.

Either the driving fever cooled, however, or Wych

Hazel found out at last that even thoughts may be troublesome company; for she began suddenly to surround herself with invited guests; and one or two to breakfast, and three to dinner, and six to tea, became the new order of things for Mr. Falkirk's delectation. Some favoured young ladies even stayed over night sometimes, and then they all went driving together. Mr. Falkirk frowned, and Mrs. Bywank smiled; and cards accumulated to a fearful extent in the hall basket at Chickaree.

Rollo among others had been discomfited, by finding the young lady invisible, or, what was the same thing for his purpose, visible to too many at once. This state of things lasted some time, but in the nature of things could not last for ever. There came a morning, when Mr. Falkirk was the only visitor at the Chickaree breakfast table, and just as Mr. Falkirk's coffee was poured out, Dingee announced his co-guardian.

Well—she knew it had to come; but she could have found in her heart to execute summary justice on Dingee for the announcement, nevertheless. Nobody saw her eyes,—and nobody could help seeing her cheeks; but all else that transpired was a very reserved:

'Good morning, Mr. Rollo. You are just in time to enliven Mr. Falkirk's breakfast, over which he ran some risk of going to sleep.'

Perhaps Mr. Rollo had a flashing question cross his mind, whether he had not missed something through lack of a hunter's patience the other night; but he was too much of a hunter to do anything but make the best of circumstances. He shook hands in precisely his usual manner; remarking that Mr. Falkirk had not had a ride of four miles; took his breakfast like a man who had; and only towards the close of breakfast suddenly

turned to his hostess and asked, 'How does Jeannie Deans behave?'

Apparently Hazel's thoughts had not been held fast by the politics under discussion, for she had gone into a deep grave meditation.

'Jeannie Deans?' she said, with her face flushing all up again. 'Why—very well. The last time I rode her.'

'When was that?'

'Monday, I think, was the day of the week: but I suppose she would have behaved just as well if it had been Tuesday.'

'Then probably she would have no objection to Wednesday?'

'Other things being comformable,' said Wych Hazel, still keeping her eyes to herself.

'Do you mean, that you and she are in such sympathy, that if she does not behave well you know the reason?'

'I never sympathize with anybody's ill-behaviour but my own,' said Hazel, 'if that is what you mean.'

'I meant,' said Rollo with perfect gravity, 'that perhaps she sympathized with *yours?*'

'It occurs to me in this connection—talking of behaviour,'—said Miss Kennedy, 'that I had a question to ask of you two gentlemen, which it may save time—and trouble—to state while you are both together. Are you attending to me, sir?' she asked, looking straight over at her other guardian now,—'or has your mind gone off to: "Grand Vizier certainly strangled"?'

'My mind never goes off when you begin to state questions, Miss Hazel; knowing that it will probably have work enough at home.'

'This one is extremely simple, sir. Why, when you both agreed that I should have neither saddle-horse nor pony for my own individual use, did you not tell me so at once? Instead of keeping me all summer in a state of hope deferred and disappointment in hand?'

'Shall I take the burden of explanation on myself, sir?' asked Rollo.

'If you like. It lies on you properly,' said Mr. Falkirk, in anything but an amiable voice.

'Then may I order up Jeannie for you?' Rollo went on with a smile, to Wych Hazel; 'and I will explain as we go along.'

'That is to say, there is no explanation, but just the one I had made out for myself. Mr. Falkirk, did I ever practise any underhand dealings with you?' she said.

'Don't begin to do it with me,' said Rollo. 'Suppose you put on your habit, and in half an hour we'll have it all out on the road.'

'Your respective ancestors must have been invaluable in the old Salem times,' said the young lady, arching her brows a little. 'In these days I think truth should win truth.' With which expression of opinion Miss Wych whistled for a fresh glass of water and dismissed the subject. Not without a smothered sigh, however.

'I did not understand,' said Rollo, 'that expression of respect for our ancestors.'

'Naturally. As I expressed none. But I remember —you belong across the sea; where witchcraft probably is unknown, and so is never dealt with.'

'What would you give as the best manner of dealing with it?' Rollo inquired with admirable command of countenance.

'I suppose I should let them go their way. But then, being one of the guild, I of course fail to see the danger; and cannot appreciate the mild form of fear which has shadowed Mr. Falkirk for ten years past, nor the sharper attack which has suddenly seized Mr. Rollo.' She could keep her face too, looking carelessly down and poising her teaspoon.

'What becomes of your kitten, when you are suddenly made aware that there are strange dogs about?' said Rollo again, eyeing her.

'My kitten, indeed!'—said Hazel, with just so much stir of her composure as recognized the look which yet she did not see. 'Did you ever hear of a dog's cajoling a cat, Mr. Rollo?'

'Did *you* never hear of puss in a corner?'

'Yes,' she said. 'You would not think it, but I am very good at that.'

'You are very good at something else,' said he smiling. 'Will you permit me to remind you, that I have not yet had the honour of an answer to my inquiry whether your witchship will ride this morning?'

If Mr. Falkirk had been away, it is not sure what she would have answered; But Hazel had no mind to draw out even silent comments from him. So she gave a hesitating answer that yet granted the appeal. Then wished the next moment she had not given it. Would she need most courage to take it back, or to go on?

'If you will excuse me, then, I will go and see to the horses. I leave you, Mr. Falkirk, to defend yourself! I have been unable to decoy the enemy.'

With which he went off. Mr. Falkirk's brows were drawn pretty close.

'Miss Hazel, I should like to be told, now that we are

alone, in what way I have failed to meet "truth with truth"?'

'My dear sir, how you do scowl at me!' said Miss Hazel, retaking her easy manner, now that *her* enemy was away. 'I only used the word in a popular sense. If I never misled *you*, then you had no right to mislead *me*.'

'How were you misled, Miss Hazel?'

'I supposed, being somewhat simple-minded, that the reason horse, pony, and basket wagon did not appear, was that they could not be found, sir. It shews how ignorant I am of the world still, I must acknowledge.'

'I have no opinion of ponies and basket wagons,' said her guardian. 'And I do not know how well you can drive. And you are too young, Miss Hazel, and too—well, you are too young to be allowed to drive round the world by yourself. When Cinderella, no, when Quickear, sets off to seek her fortune, she goes fast enough in all nature without a pony.'

'There are just two little faults in your statement, sir, considered as an answer. I never was fast'—said Miss Hazel,—'but trying to hoodwink me is not likely to make me slow,'—and she went off to don her habit and gather herself up for the ride.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A COTTON MILL.

AS she came to the side door, she saw Rollo just dismounting from Jeannie Deans, and immediately preparing to remove his saddle and substitute the side-saddle ; which he did with the care used on a former occasion. But Jeannie had raised her head and given a whinny of undoubted pleasure.

'Let her go, Mr. Rollo,' whispered Lewis.

And so released, the little brown steed set off at once, walking straight to the verandah steps, pausing there and looking up to watch Hazel, renewing her greeting in lower tones, as if *this* were private and confidential. Hazel ran down the steps, and made her fingers busy with bridle and mane, giving furtive caresses. Only when she was mounted, and Rollo had turned, his ear caught the sound of one or two little soft whispers that were meant for Jeannie's ears alone.

Perhaps the gentleman wanted to give Wych Hazel's thoughts a convenient diversion ; perhaps he wished to get upon some safe common ground of interest and intercourse ; perhaps he purposed to wear off any awkwardness that might embarrass their mutual good understanding ; for he prefaced the ride with a series of instructions in horsemanship. Mr. Falkirk had never let his ward practise leaping ; Rollo knew that ; but now, and with

Mr. Falkirk looking on, he ordered up the two grooms with a bar, and gave Wych Hazel a lively time for half an hour. A good solid riding lesson, too; and probably for that space of time at least attained all his ends. But when he himself was mounted, and they had set off upon a quiet descent of the Chickaree hill, out of sight of Mr. Falkirk, all Wych Hazel's shyness came back again; hiding itself behind reserve. Rollo was in rather a gay mood.

'It is good practice,' he said. 'Did you ever go through a cotton mill?'

'Never.'

'How would you like to go through one to-day?'

'Why—I do not know. Very well, I daresay.'

So with this slight and doubtful encouragement, Rollo again took the way to Morton Hollow. It was early October now; the maples and hickories showing red and yellow; the air a wonderful compound of spicy sweetness and strength; the heaven over their heads mottled with filmy stretches of cloud, which seemed to float in the high ether quite at rest. A day for all sorts of things; good for exertion, and equally inviting one to be still and think.

'How happens it you have let Jeannie stand still so long?' Rollo asked presently.

'I have not wanted to ride her,—that is all.'

'Would you like her better if she were your own?' he said quite gently, though with a keen eye directed at Wych Hazel's face.

'No. Not now.' The 'now' slipped out by mistake, and might mean either of two things. Rollo did not feel sure what it meant.

'Did you ever notice,' he said after a few minutes

again, 'how different the clouds of this season are from those of other times of the year? Look at those high bands of vapour lying along towards the south; they seem absolutely poised and still. Clouds in spring and summer are drifting, or flying, or dispersing, or gathering: earnest and purposeful; with work to do, and hurrying to do it. Look at those yonder; they are at rest, as if all the work of the year were done up. I think they say it is.'

The fair grave face was lifted, shewing uncertainty through the light veil; and she looked up intently at the sky, almost wondering to herself if there *had* been clouds in the spring and early summer. She hardly seemed to remember them.

'Is that what they say to you? she said dreamily. 'They look to me as if they were just waiting,—waiting to see where the wind will rise.'

'But the wind does not rise in October. They will lie there, on the blessed blue, half the day. It looks to me like the rest after work.'

She glanced at him.

'I do not know much about work,' she said. 'What I suppose you would call work. It has not come into my hands.'

'It has not come into mine,' said Rollo. 'But can there be rest without work going before it?'

'Such stillness?' she said, looking up at the white flecks again. 'But according to that, we do not either of us know rest.'

'Well,' said he smiling, 'I do not. Do you?'

'I used to think I did. What do you mean by rest, Mr. Rollo?'

'Look at those lines of cloud. They tell. The re-

pose of satisfied exertion; the happy looking back upon work done, after the call for work is over.'

She looked up, and kept looking up; but she did not speak. Somehow the new combinations of these last weeks had made her sober; she did not get used to them. The little wayward scraps of song had been silent, and the quick speeches did not come.

'But then,' Rollo went on again presently, 'then comes up another question. What is work? I mean, what is work for such people as you and I?'

'I suppose,' said Hazel, 'whatever we find to do.'

'I have not found anything. Have you? Those clouds somehow seem to speak reproach to me. May be that is their business.'

'I have not been looking,' said Hazel. 'You know I have been shut up until this summer. But I should think you might have found plenty,—going among people as you do.'

'What sort?'

'Different sorts, I suppose. At least if you are as good at making work for yourself in some cases as you are in others,' she said with a queer little recollective gleam in her face. 'Did it never occur to you that you might set the world straight—and persuade its orbit into being regular?'

'No,' said Rollo carelessly, 'I never undertake more than I can manage. Here is a good place for a run.'

They had come into the long level lane which led to Morton Hollow; and giving their horses the rein they swept through the October air in a flight which scorned the ground. When the banks of the lane began to grow higher and to close in upon the narrowing roadway, which also became crooked and irregular, they drew bridle again and returned to earth.

'Don't you feel set straight now?' said Rollo.

'Thank you—no.'

'I am afraid you will give me some work to do, yet,' said he audaciously, and putting his hand out upon Wych Hazel's. 'Do not carry quite so loose a rein. Jeannie is sure, I believe, and you are fearless; but you should always let her know you are there.'

'Mr. Rollo—' said the girl hastily. Then she stopped.

'What?' said Rollo innocently, riding close alongside and looking her hard in the face. 'I am here.'

'Nothing.'

Then he changed his tone and said gently, 'What was it, Miss Hazel?'

'Something better unsaid.'

He was silent a minute, and went on gravely—

'You wanted to know why I interfered the other night, as I did; and I promised, I believe, to explain it to you when I had an opportunity. I will, if you bid me; but I may do the people injustice, and I would rather you took the view of an unprejudiced person—Mr. Falkirk, for instance. But if you wish it, I will tell you myself.'

'No,' she said; 'I do not wish it.'

Rollo was quite as willing to let the matter drop; and in a few minutes more they were at the mill he had proposed to visit. There they dismounted, the horses were sent on to the bend in the valley, beyond the mills; and presenting a pass, Rollo and Wych Hazel were admitted into the building, where strangers rarely came. One of the men in authority was known to Mr. Rollo; he presented himself now, and with much civility ushered them through the works.

They made a slow progress of it; full of interest, be cause full of intelligent appreciation. Perhaps, in the the abstract, one would not expect to find a gay young man of the world versed in the intricacies of a cotton mill; but however it were, Rollo had studied the subject, and was now bent on making Wych Hazel understand all the beautiful details of the machinery and the curiosities of the manufacture. This was a new view of him to his companion. He took endless pains to make her familiar with the philosophy of the subject, as well as its history. Patient and gentle and evidently not in the least thinking of himself, his grey eyes were ever searching in Wych Hazel's face to see whether she comprehended and how she enjoyed what he was giving her. As to the relations between them, his manner all the while, as well as during the ride, was very much what it had been before the disclosure made by Mrs. Coles had sent Wych Hazel off on a tangent of alienation from him. Nothing could exceed the watch kept over her, or the care taken of her; and neither could make less demonstration. There was also the same quiet assumption of her, which had been in his manner for so long; that also was never officiously displayed, though never wanting when there was occasion. And now, in the mill, all these went along with that courtier-like deference of style, which paid her all the honour that manner could; yet it was the deference of one very near and not of one far off.

Wych Hazel for her part shewed abundant power of interest and of understanding, in their progress through the mill; quick to catch explanations, quick to see the beauty of some fine bit of machinery; but very quiet. Her eyes hardly ever rose to the level of his; her

questions were a little more free to the conductor than to him. Even her words and smiles to the mill people seemed to wait for times when his back was turned, as if she were shy of in any wise displaying herself before him.

Their progress through the mill was delayed further by Rollo's interest in the operatives. A rather sad interest this had need to be. The men, and the women, employed as hands in the works, were lank and pale and haggard, or dark and coarse. Their faces were reserved and gloomy; eyes would not light up, even when spoken to; and Rollo tried the expedient pretty often. Yet the children were the worst. Little things, and others older, but all worn-looking, sadly pale, very hopeless, going back and forth at their work like so many parts of the inexorable machinery. Here Rollo now and then got a smile, that gleamed out as a rare thing in that atmosphere. On the whole, the outer air seemed strange and sweet to the two when they came out into it, and not more sweet than strange. Where they had been, surely the beauty, and the freedom, and the promise, of the pure oxygen and the blue heaven, were all shut out and denied and forgotten.

'There is work for somebody to do,' said Rollo thoughtfully, when the mill door was shut behind them.

The girl looked at him gravely, then away.

'Do all mill people look so?' she said. 'Or is it just Morton Hollow?'

'They do not all look so. At least I am told this is a very uncommon case for this country. Yet no doubt there are others, and it is not—"just Morton Hollow." Suppose, for the sake of argument, that all mill people look so; what deduction would you draw?'

'Well, that I should like to have the mills,' said Wych Hazel.

They walked slowly on through the Hollow. The place was still and empty; all the hands being in the mills; the buzz of machinery within, as they passed one, was almost the only sound abroad. The cottages were forlorn looking places; set anywhere, without reference to the consideration whether space for a garden ground was to be had. No such thing as a real garden could be seen. No flowers bloomed anywhere; no token of life's comfort or pleasure hung about the poor dwellings. Poverty and dirt and barrenness; those three facts struck the visitor's eye and heart. A certain degree of neatness and order indeed was enforced about the road and the outside of the houses; nothing to give the feeling of the sweet reality within. The only person they saw to speak to was a woman sitting at an open door crying It would not have occurred to most people that she was one 'to speak to'; however, Rollo stepped a little out of the road to open communication with her. His companion followed, but the words were German.

'What is the matter?' she asked as they turned to go on their way.

'Do you remember the girl that came to Gyda's that day you were there? this is her mother. Trüdchen, she says, has been sick for two weeks; very ill; she has just begun to sit up; and her father has driven her to mill work again this morning. The mother says she knows the girl will die.'

'Driven her to work!' said Hazel. 'What for?'

'Money. For her wages.'

'What nonsense!' said Hazel, knitting her brows. 'Why, I can pay that! Tell her so, please, will you?

And tell her to send Trüdchen down to Chickaree for Mrs. Bywank and me to cure her up. She will never get well here.'

Rollo gave a swift bright look at his companion, and then made three leaps up the bank to the cottage door. He came down again smiling, but there was a suspicious veiling of his sharp eyes.

'She will cry no more to-day,' he remarked to Wych Hazel. 'And now you have done some work.'

'Have I?'—with a half laugh. 'But instead of wanting to rest, I feel like doing some more. So you have made a mistake somewhere, Mr. Rollo.'

There came as she spoke, a buzz of other voices, issuing from another mill just before them; voices trained in the higher notes, and knowing little of the minor key. And forth from the opening door came a gay knot of people,—feathers and flowers and colours, with a black coat here and there; one of which made a short way to Miss Kennedy's side.

'Where have you been?' said Captain Lancaster, after a courteous recognition of Mr. Rollo. 'You have been driving us all to despair?'

'People that are driven to despair never go,' said Wych Hazel; 'so you are all safe.'

'And you are all yourself. That is plain. Why were you not at Fox Hill? But you are coming to Valley Garden to-morrow?'

'I think not. At least, I am sure not.

'Then to the ball at Crocus?'

'No.'

'My dear Hazel!' and 'My dear Miss Kennedy!' now sounded from so many female voices in different keys of surprise and triumph, that for a minute or two

the hum was indistinguishable. Questions came on the heels of one another incongruously. Then as the gentlemen fell together in a knot to discuss their horses, the tongues of the women had a little more liberty than was good for them.

'You have been riding, Hazel; where are your horses?'

'Where have you been?'

'O, you've been going over a mill! A *cotton* mill? Horrid! What is the fun of a cotton mill? what did you go there for?'

'What sort of a mill have you been over?' said Hazel.

'O, the silk mill. Such lovely colours, and cunning little silk-winders,—it's so funny! But where have you been all this age, Hazel? you have been nowhere.'

'I know what has happened,' said Josephine Powder, looking half vexed and half curious,—'you needn't tell *me* anything. When a lady sees almost nobody and goes riding with the rest, we know what *that* means. It's transparent.'

'I wouldn't conclude upon it, Hazel,' said another lady. 'A man that had got a habit of command by being one's guardian, you know, wouldn't leave it off easy. Would he, Mrs. Powder?'

'Are we to congratulate you, my dear?' asked the ex-Governor's lady, with a civil smile, and an eye to the answer.

'Really, ma'am, I see no present occasion?' said Hazel, with more truth than coolness.

'She sees no occasion!' cried Josephine. 'Well, I shouldn't either in her place.' (Which was a clear statement that grapes were sour.) 'Poor child! Are you chained up for good, Hazel?'

'Hush, Josephine?' said her mother, who was a well-bred woman; such women *can* have such daughters now-a-days. And she went on to invite Hazel to join a party that were going in the afternoon to visit a famous look-out height, called Beacon Hill. She begged Hazel to come for luncheon, and the excursion afterwards.

'Do say yes, please!' said Captain Lancaster, turning from the other group. 'You have said nothing but no for the last month.'

'Well, if being a negative means that one is not also a positive—' Hazel began.

'And then, oh Miss Kennedy,' broke in Molly Seaton, 'there's this new Englishman!—'

'A new Englishman!—'

'Yes,' said Molly, unconscious why the rest laughed; 'and he's seen you at church. And he has vowed he will not go home till he has seen you in the German.'

'Has he?' said Hazel. 'I hope he likes America.'

They gathered round her at that, in a breeze of laughter and entreaty, till her shy gravity gave way, and Mr. Rollo's ears were saluted by such a musical laugh as he had not heard for many a day.

'He'll be here presently,' said Molly. 'He's up in the mill with Kitty Fisher. So you can ask him yourself, Miss Kennedy.'

Rollo heard, and purposely held himself a little back, and continued a conversation he did not attend to; he would not be more of a spoil-sport than he could help.

'You'll come, won't you, Hazel?' said Josephine. 'I will be very good if you will come.'

Hazel balanced probabilities for one swift second.

'That is too large a promise, Phinny—I would not

make it. But I will come, thank you, Mrs. Powder. Only not to luncheon. I will drive over this afternoon, and meet you at the hill.'

'Why, here is our dear Duchess!' cried Kitty Fisher rushing up. 'And where is the—ahem!—Mr. Rollo, I am delighted to see you. Miss Kennedy, allow me to present Sir Henry Crafton.'

Wych Hazel bowed, and turning towards Mr. Rollo, remarked that if she was to come back, she must go. Rollo was also invited to Beacon Hill, but excused himself; and he and Wych Hazel left the others, to go forward to find their horses.

On the ride home he made himself particularly pleasant; talking about matters which he contrived to present in very entertaining fashion; ignoring the people and the insinuations they had left behind them in the Hollow, and drawing Wych Hazel, so far as he could, into a free meeting of him on neutral ground. They had another run through the lane; a good trot over the highway; and when they had entered the gate of Chickaree and were slowly mounting the hill, he spoke in another tone.

'Miss Hazel, don't you think you have done enough for to-day?'

'Made a good beginning.'

'Twenty-four miles on horseback—and a cotton mill! That is enough for one day, isn't it, for you?'

'Twenty-four, is it?' she said carelessly. 'Call it four, and my feeling will not contradict you.'

'Very well. I want your feeling to remain in the same healthy condition.'

'It always does.'

'Beacon Hill will not run away. Leave that for another time. It is a good day's work for you, that alone

Suppose we go there to-morrow?' said Rollo coolly, looking at his companion.

'Well—if I like it well enough to-day.'

Dane was silent, probably feeling that his duty as Miss Kennedy's guardian was in the way of doing him very frequent disservice. However he was not a man to be swayed by that consideration. He came close alongside of Jeannie Deans and looked hard in Wych Hazel's face as he spoke,

'Do you think Mr. Falkirk would be willing to have you go to-day?'

'Why, of course!'

'I think he would not. And I think he ought not.'

'Mr. Falkirk never interferes with my strength or my fatigue!—'

'I shall not ask him. I take the matter on my own responsibility.'

She had thrown her veil back for a minute, and leaving the bridle on Jeannie's neck, both little hands were busy with some wind-disturbed rings of hair. She put them down now and looked round at him,—a look of great beauty; the girlish questioning eyes too busy with him, for the moment, to be afraid. Could he mean that? was he really trying to head her off in every direction?

'Are you in earnest?' she said slowly.

His eyes went very deep into hers when they got the chance, carrying their own message too. He answered with a half smile,

'Thorough earnest.'

She drew back instantly, eyes and all; letting fall her veil and taking up her bridle. Except so, and by the sudden colour, giving no reply. She was learning her lesson fast, she thought, a little bitterly. Nevertheless,

if people knew the exquisite grace there can be in submission, whether to authority or to circumstances, it may be they would practise it oftener.

Not another word said Rollo. What was the use? She would understand him some day;—or she would not! in any case, words would not make it clear. Only when he took her down from her horse he asked, and that was with a smile too, and a good inquisition of the grey eyes, 'if he should come to take her to Beacon Hill to-morrow?'

'No,' she said quietly. 'I think not.'

'When will you have another riding lesson?'

'I do not know,' she said, with a tone that left the matter very doubtful.

'Well,' said he,' 'you may go to Beacon Hill without me. But you must not try leaping. Remember that.

He did not go in. He remounted and rode away.

CHAPTER XL.

SOMETHING NEW.

SO Jeannie Deans went back into the stable, and carried her light burden no more for some time. But Hazel did not go to Beacon Hill, in any fashion nor on any day; and it is to be hoped Jeannie Deans was less restless than she.

'Miss Wych—my dear!' said Mrs. Bywank in remonstrance; 'if you cannot sit still, why don't you go out? You are just wearing yourself pale in the house; and why, I do not see.'

'Nobody sees—' said the girl with a long breath. 'My wings are clipped, Byo,—that is all.'

'My dear!' Mrs. Bywank said again. 'I think you shouldn't talk so, Miss Wych.'

'Very likely not,' said Hazel. 'But if ever I am a real runaway, Byo, it will be for the sake of choosing my own ruler. So you can remember.'

'Miss Wych—' Mrs. Bywank began, gravely. Hazel came and flung herself down on the floor, and laid head on the old housekeeper's lap.

'O, I know!' she said. 'Why did they ever call me so, Byo? I think it hangs over me like a fate. Could they find no other name for their little brown baby but that? I can no more help being a witch, than I can help breathing'

The old housekeeper stroked the young head tenderly, softly parting and smoothing down the hair.

'They liked the name, my dear,' she said. 'And so would you, if you could remember the tone in which Mrs. Kennedy used to say: "My Wych!"—"My little Wych!"—'

Hazel sprang away as if the words had been a flight of arrows.

And so the fall went on; and since Miss Kennedy would stay at home, perforce the world must come to see her there; and the old house at least sounded gay enough. And then society began slowly to steal away to winter quarters. The two young officers went back to their posts, without even a hope (it was said) that might make them ever return again to the neighborhood of Chickaree. And Mr. May sailed for Europe, having a gentle dismissal from the little hands for which he cared so much; and the Powders departed to ex-official duties; and Mme. Lasalle to town. The leaves fell, having done their sweet summer duty far better than these rational creatures; and then Wych Hazel took to long early and late walks by herself, threading the leafless woods, and keeping out of roads and choosing by-paths; wandering and thinking—both—more than was good for her; and enjoying just one thing, the being alone.

Rollo all this while had kept the promise he made when he told her that he would see her and meant she should see him. He came very frequently; he rode with her if she would ride, and talked with her when she would talk; or he talked to Mr. Falkirk in her hearing. He sometimes gave her riding lessons. Whatever her mood, he was just himself; free, pleasant and watchful of her; sometimes a little Spanish in his treatment of

her. Her clouds did not seem to put him in shadow. And she would not always refuse a lesson, or a ride, or a talk,—it was not in her nature to be ungraceful or rough in any way; only it could not be said that she took pleasure in them, as a certain thing. They broke up the intolerable loneliness of her life just then, but otherwise were not always a success. Constantly now expecting to be drawn back, or ordered back, as she phrased it; expecting forbidden things at every turn; she did not want to be alone with Mr. Rollo, nor to go with other people where he might come. In fact, she did not quite understand herself; and she grew more and more restless and eager to get away.

'Why should we not go on Monday?' she asked Mr. Falkirk.

'Go?' echoed her guardian. 'Are we to take up our travels again, my dear?'

'Did you suppose yourself settled for the winter, sir? I expect to go to town, like other people.'

'What are we to do when we get there?'

'Keep house, sir. You can take one-half the bricks, and I the other. Or any proportions that may suit your views,' said Miss Hazel compliantly.

Now Mr. Falkirk did not, it is true, understand the course things had taken for the last few weeks; he was only a man; and though Wych Hazel's guardian for many years might be supposed to hold a clue to her moods, this was what Mr. Falkirk failed to do in the present instance. But using his wits as well as he was able, he had come to the conclusion, not without some secret gratification, that Miss Hazel preferred the society of her old guardian to that of her new one. Certainly he was in no mind to cross her wish to go to the city, if

she had such a wish. However, mindful of his duty, he mentioned her desire to Rollo, and asked if he had any objection to it. Rollo was silent a minute, and then gave a frank 'No.' And Mr. Falkirk wrote to make arrangements, and even went himself to perfect them. And he lost no time; by the end of October the change was made, and Wych Hazel established in a snug little house in one of the best streets on Murray Hill.

If Mr. Falkirk was misled before, his mind was not likely to clear up as the weeks went on. Whatever had come over his ward, she was unmistakably changed from her old self; as now, living in the house with her again, Mr. Falkirk could not fail to perceive. Quiet steps, a gentle voice that quite ignored its old bursts of singing; brown eyes that looked softly through things and people at something else; with a mood docile because it did not care: but *that* he did not know. Apparently she had not come to town for stir,—her going out was of the quietest kind. Sometimes a specially fine concert would tempt her; once in a while she made one of her radiant toilettes and went to a state dinner party, now and then to a lunch or a kettle-drum; but balls and evening parties of every sort were invariably declined. Instead, she plunged into study,—went at German as if her life depended on it, took up her Italian again, and began to perfect herself in French. Read history, knit her brows over science, and sat and drew by the hour.

Of course society could not quite be baffled so: mornings brought carriage after carriage, and evenings a run upon the door. Mr. Falkirk had little peace of his life, unless it were a reposeful thing for him to sit by and see the play.

Between whiles this winter, Hazel did a great deal of

thinking: even German could not crowd it out. She knew, the minute she had said she would come to town, that she wished something could step in and keep her at Chickaree; or at least she knew that she was leaving more there than she had counted upon; and the knowledge chafed her. It was all very well to like—somebody—(name of course unknown)—to a certain degree; but when the liking made itself into bonds and ties and hindrances, then Miss Wych rebelled. She brought up all sorts of questions in the most unattractive shape, to find them suited with answers that could find no reply. It was simply unbearable, she urged upon herself, this being held in and watched and restricted,—very unbearable! Only, somehow, the person who did it all, was *not*. And the doubt whether life would be worth having, in such guardianship, started a more difficult point: what would it be worth without? And the mental efforts to shake herself into clear order, just seemed, as sometimes happens, to tie three knots where there was one before.

'It will go after a while,' she said, twisting herself about under the new form of loneliness and unrest which possessed her when she got to town. And it did: deeper in.

Mr. Falkirk, blind bat that he was (for a sharp-sighted man), was not discontented with his winter. He had Wych Hazel to himself, and she gave him no more trouble than he liked by the force of old associations. He watched the play in which she was so prominent and so pretty a figure, and found it amusing. It seemed safe play, so far; the fort that he was set to keep seemed quite secure from any attacks that presently threatened; and Mr. Falkirk had no suspicion that its safety

was owing to a garrison within the walls. The outside he knew he watched well. It was a very quiet winter, indeed, except at such times as Miss Kennedy's doors were open to all comers; but Mr. Falkirk did not find fault with that. He had never been garrulous in his ward's company or in any other. Certainly he liked to hear *her* talk; and he knew that she talked far less than usual, when they were alone; but he argued with himself that Wych Hazel was growing older, was seriously engaging herself in study, after other than a schoolgirl's fashion; and that all this winter's development was but the sweet maturing of the fruit which in growing mature was losing somewhat of its liveliness of flavour.

They were alone one evening, rather past the middle of the winter. It was not one of Miss Kennedy's at-home nights; and in a snug little drawing-room the two were seated on opposite sides of the tea service. A fire of soft coal burning luxuriously; thick curtains drawn; warm-coloured paperhangings on the walls; silver bright in the gaslight, and Mr. Falkirk's evening papers ready at his hand. To-night Mr. Falkirk rather neglected them, and seemed to be in a meditative mood.

'Whereabouts are we in pursuit of our fortune, Miss Hazel?' he asked as he tasted his cup of hot tea.

'Rather deep down in Schiller and Dante, sir.'

'*Il Paradiso?*' asked Mr. Falkirk meaningly.

'Pray do you call that "deep down"?' demanded Miss Hazel.

'I am merely inquiring where you are, my dear. I have heard of people's being over head and ears.'

'Only hearsay evidence, sir?' said Miss Hazel reck-

lessly. But then she was not going to stand up and be shot at!

'I should like to know, merely as a satisfaction to my own mind, whether the quest is ended, Miss Hazel? Has Cinderella's glass slipper been fitted on? or has Quickear seized the singing bird and the golden water?'

'Princes are scarce!' said the girl derisively, but not without a rising blush.

'The true one not found yet, my dear?' said Mr. Falkirk with an amused glance across the table. 'What is to be our next move in search of him?'

'That is one way of putting it,' said Wych Hazel. 'I should think, sir, you had taken lessons of your devotee, Miss Fisher.

'I am glad *you* don't,' said Mr. Falkirk earnestly. 'Miss Hazel, I should prefer that when *such* princesses are in the parlour, Cinderella should keep to her kitchen. It is the court end in such a case.'

Kitty Fisher's name brought up visions. Hazel was silent.

'Do you ever hear from Chickaree?' her guardian asked presently.

'No one to write, sir, but Mrs. Bywank,—and she, you know, is not a scribe. I understand that the kitten is well.'

'That is important,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'She hasn't told you lately anything about your friend Rollo?'

'No, Sir. Have you given up your share in his friendship?' inquired Miss Hazel.

Mr. Falkirk made no answer to this query, and seemed to have forgotten it presently in his musings. Hazel glanced at him furtively, choosing her form of attack;

for Mr. Falkirk's manner seemed to say that he *had* heard.

'You always played into each other's hands so delightfully, sir,' she began, with a very *degagé* air,—'it is of course natural that he should keep you posted as to his own important proceedings. And a little ungrateful in you, Mr. Falkirk, I must say, to fling him off in this fashion.'

'I've nothing on my conscience respecting him,' said Mr. Falkirk, eating his toast with a contented air. 'I'm not *his* guardian, nor ever was.'

'What a pity!' said Wych Hazel. 'Both of us together might have made your life more lively than my unassisted efforts could do.'

Mr. Falkirk grunted, and went on with his tea; and sent his cup to be refilled.

Hazel pondered.

'You seem depressed, Mr. Falkirk,' she said. 'Shall I give you an additional lump of sugar?'

Now Mr. Falkirk in truth seemed anything but depressed; and he raised his head to look at his questioner.

'I am quite satisfied with things as they are, Miss Hazel.'

'Are you, sir? I am delighted!' said Hazel. 'But I never even supposed such a thing possible. How are "things"—if I may be allowed to inquire?'

'Some things are new,' returned her guardian. 'And I should not be satisfied with them, if they concerned me. Which I take for granted they do not. I saw Dr. Arthur down town to-day; and he told me some odd news about Rollo.' Mr. Falkirk was finishing his tea in a leisurely way, evidently *not* thinking that the news, whatever it was, concerned either of them seriously.

'Why did you not bring Dr. Arthur home to tea?' inquired his ward.

'I did not think of it, Miss Hazel. But he volunteered a visit in the course of the evening.'

'That will be delightful,—I like Dr. Arthur,' said Hazel, feeling that somehow or other she must get a glimpse of his news before he came.

'Well, if what he said gave you so much pleasure, why don't you repeat it to me, Mr. Falkirk?' she ventured.

'I do not remember that I said anything gave me pleasure,' returned her guardian. 'This don't. By what he says, Rollo has lost his wits. I thought him a shrewd man of business; and he was that, when your affairs were in his hand last summer; but if what Dr. Arthur tells me is true, and it must be, he has done a very strange thing with his own fortune.'

'Dear me! I hope he did not hurt himself looking after mine!' said Wych Hazel innocently. 'Are fortune and wits both in peril, Mr. Falkirk?!

'Not yours, I hope,' said her guardian. 'I should be very uneasy if I thought that. *I* should have no power to interfere. The will gives him absolute control, supposing that he had control at all.'

Perhaps it was just as well that at this moment Dr. Arthur was announced. Alas, not only Dr. Arthur, but Mrs. Coles! And Hazel, giving greetings to one and welcome to the other; insisting that they should come to the tea table, late as it was; went on all the while looking after her own wits and picking up her energies with all speed. She had need; for the harmless-seeming eyes of Mrs. Coles were always awake to her neighbours' interests. Very graciously now they watched Wych Hazel.

There was a great deal to talk about, in Miss Kennedy's house and winter and engagements; and in Dr. Maryland's home, and Primrose, and her school. An endless succession of points of talk, that ought to have been very interesting, to judge by the spirit with which they were discussed. All the while, Wych Hazel was watching for something else; and Prudentia, was she keeping the best for the last? She was extremely affable; she enjoyed her tea; she took off her bonnet and displayed the pale bandeaux of hair which were inevitably associated in Miss Kennedy's mind with one particular day and conversation; she admired the furniture; she discoursed on the advantages of city life. Dr. Maryland was, perforce, rather silent.

'Well, Arthur dear,' she said at last, taking her bonnet, 'we must be going presently. What do you think of Dane, Mr. Falkirk?'

Mr. Falkirk did not answer intelligibly, though the lady's face was turned full upon him; he uttered an inexplicable sort of grunt, and knotted his eyebrows. He didn't like Prudentia.

'I never saw anybody so changed in all my life,' pursued the lady. 'Such sudden changes are doubtful things, I always think;—come probably from some sudden cause, and may not last. But it is very surprising while it *does* last.'

'I am sorry to contradict you, Prudens,' said Dr. Arthur here; 'but Dane was never more himself. He only happens to stand facing due north instead of north by east.'

'He was "north" enough before,' said his sister, a little, *just* a little bitterly; 'a trifle more of southern direction wouldn't have hurt him. But *I* think, he's out

of his head. Men are, sometimes, you know', she went on, looking full at Wych Hazel now. 'I shall let Miss Kennedy be judge. Do you know what Dane has been doing, Miss Kennedy?'

'Not waltzing?' said Hazel, opening her brown eyes with an expression of mild dismay which was very nearly too much for Dr. Arthur.

'Waltzing?' said Prudentia, mystified. 'I did not say anything about waltzing. Why shouldn't he waltz? I think he used. Why yes; he was a famous waltzer. Don't you waltz, Miss Kennedy?'

'But I was always known to be out of my head,' said Hazel. 'In what other possible way could Mr. Rollo shew the state of his?'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Prudentia, handling her bonnet. 'Then you haven't heard my story already. You know that old Mr. Morton has failed; did you hear of that?'

'Not the first time, is it?' said Miss Kennedy coolly. Dr. Arthur bit his lips.

'Yes, my dear! it's the first and only time; he was always supposed to be a very rich man. Well, Dane has taken his fortune and thrown it into those mills!'

'I was afraid you were going to say the mill stream,' said Wych Hazel, who was getting so nervous she didn't know what to do with herself; 'but the mills seem a safe place.'

'I don't know but he'd better done that of the two,' said Prudentia. 'A safe place? Why, my dear, just think! he has bought all of Mr. Morton's right and title there; with Mr. Morton's three mills. Of course, it *must* have taken very nearly his whole fortune; it *must*.'

'I fancy there's a trifle left over,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'But I can't conceive what possessed him. What does Rollo know of the mill business?'

'Nothing at all, of course,' said Prudentia. 'Nor of any other business. And he has shewed his ignorance—did Arthur tell you, sir, how he has shewed it?'

'In buying three mills to begin with,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'A modest man would have begun with one.

'But my dear sir, *that* isn't all. What *do* you suppose, Miss Kennedy, was his first move?'

'One is prepared for almost anything.'

'He will learn the business, before long,' said Dr. Arthur, 'if close attention can do it.'

'What should he learn the business for?' said his sister. 'He has already all that the mill business could give him, without any trouble. *I* think he's troubled in his wits; I do indeed. He was always a wild boy, and now he's a wilder man.'

'Troubled in his wits!' said Dr. Arthur, with such supreme derision, that Wych Hazel laughed. To her own great relief, be it said.

'But what is this that he has done?' Mr. Falkirk inquired, his brows looking very much disgusted.

'My dear sir! Fancy it. Fancy it, Miss Kennedy. The first thing he did was to *raise the wages of his hands!*'

Just one person caught the gleam from under Hazel's down-cast eyes,—perhaps something made his own quick-sighted. Dr. Arthur answered for her.

'They were not half paid before, Mr. Falkirk. That explains it.'

'Weren't they paid as other mill hands are paid, Dr. Arthur?'

'The more need for a change, then,' said the young man, who was a trifle Quixotic himself.

'But if the change is made by one man alone, he effects nothing but his own ruin.

'That is what Dane is about, I am firmly persuaded,' said Mrs. Coles.

'No man ever yet went to ruin by doing right,' said Dr. Maryland.

'Many a one!' said Mr. Falkirk,—'by doing what he *thought* right; from John Brown up to John Huss, and from John Huss back to the time when history is lost in a fog bank.'

'They'll get their reward, I suppose, in the other world,' said Prudentia comfortably.

'How will his ruin affect the poor mill people?' said Wych Hazel, so seriously, that perhaps only Mr. Falkirk —knowing her—knew what she was about.

'Why, my dear, it ruins them too in the end; that's it. When *he* fails, of course his improvements fail, and everything goes back where it was before. Only worse.'

'Precisely,' said Mr Falkirk. 'You cannot lift the world out of the grooves it runs in, by mere force; and he who tries, will put his shoulder out of joint.'

'Then my picture of "the loss of all things," is the portrait of a ruined man!' said Wych Hazel, with an expressive glance at Dr. Maryland. He smiled.

'It partly depends, you know, Miss Kennedy, upon where the race is supposed to end. But our friend is running well at present, for both worlds.'

'Arthur, he is not!' said his sister emphatically. 'Paul and John Charteris, the other mill-owners, hate him as hard as they can hate him; and if they can ruin him, they will; that you may depend upon.'

'And his own people love him as hard as they can,—so that, even if you allow one rich mill-owner to be worth a hundred poor employés, Dane can still strike a fair balance.'—Rather more than that, Dr. Arthur thought, as his quick eyes took notice of the little screening hand that came suddenly up about Wych Hazel's mouth and chin.

'That's all nonsense, Arthur; business is business, and not sentiment. I never heard of a cotton mill yet that was run upon sentiment; nor did you. And I tell you, it won't pay. I am speaking of business *as* business. Paul and John Charteris will ruin Dane, if they can.'

'They probably can,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'They will make a combination with other mill-owners and undersell him; and paying less wages they can afford to do it, for a time. And a certain time will settle Rollo's business.'

'I think he has lost his wits,' Prudentia repeated, for the third or fourth utterance. 'Then another thing he has done—But really, Arthur, my dear, we must go.'

'O tell us some more!' said Miss Kennedy. 'We have not heard of any wits lost in this way, all winter; and it is quite exciting. What next, Mrs. Coles?'

Prudentia laughed.

'How comes it he don't tell you himself? I thought you used to be such friends—riding about everywhere. But indeed *we* don't see much of Dane now; he lives at his old nurse's ever so much of the time; and comes scouring over the country on that bay horse of his, to consult papa about something;—but *I* never see him, except through the window. Sometimes he rides your

brown horse, I think, Miss Kennedy. I suppose he is keeping it in order for you.'

'Well, that certainly does sound erratic!' said Miss Kennedy, drawing a long breath. 'I hope he will confine all new-fangled notions to the bay.'

'He has taught that creature to stand still,' said Mrs. Coles, looking at her.

'That must afford him immense satisfaction! Rather hard upon the bay, though.'

'He stands as still as a mountain,' Prudentia went on, carrying on meanwhile privately a mental speculation about Wych Hazel;—'he stands like a glossy statue, without being held, too; and comes when Dane snaps his fingers to him.'

'It only shews what unexpected docility exists in some natures,' said Miss Kennedy with an unreadable face.

'Come, Prudens—tell your story and have done!' said Dr. Arthur, speaking now. 'I have an appointment.'

'I am quite ready,' said Mrs. Coles starting up. Dear me! we have stayed an unconscionable time, but Miss Kennedy will forgive us, being country people and going back to the country to-morrow. Prim says Dane is coming down before long.'

'Tell your story!'

'Miss Kennedy won't care for it, and it will ruin Dane with Mr. Falkirk. He has introduced something like English penny readings at Morton Hollow,' said Prudentia, putting on her bonnet and turning towards Wych Hazel's guardian.

'What are penny readings?' said Mr. Falkirk.

'They had their origin in England, I believe; some-

body set them on foot for the benefit of the poorer classes, or work people ; and Dane has imported them. He receives the employés of the mills,' said Prudentia, chuckling,—'whoever will come and pay a penny ; his own workmen and the others. The levee is held on Saturday nights ; and Dane lays himself out to amuse them with reading to them and singing. Fancy it! Fancy Dane reading all sorts of things to those audiences! and the evenings are so interesting, I am told, that they do not disperse till eleven o'clock. I believe he has it in contemplation to add the more material refreshment of sandwiches and coffee as soon as he gets his arrangements perfected. And he is going to build, as soon as the spring opens, O, I don't know what!'

'Fools build houses, and other people live in them,' said Mr. Falkirk.

'O, it's not houses to live in—though I have a notion he is going to do that too. He lives with old Gyda pretty much of the time.'

'Well,' said Dr. Arthur, looking at Mr. Falkirk but speaking to Wych Hazel, 'I need only add, that my father thoroughly approves of all Rollo's work.'

'Work?—does he call it "work"?' said Wych Hazel, looking up.

'It is not exactly play, Miss Kennedy!'—

But the soft laugh that answered that, no one could define.

'He won't find it play by and by,' said Mr Falkirk.

CHAPTER XLI.

A LESSON.

THIS visit and talk gave Hazel a great deal to ponder. The work, and—the doer of it ; and—did he ever think of her, she questioned, in the doing? And did he expect to make *her* 'stand, as he had the bay'? and come, if he but 'snapped his fingers'? On the whole, Miss Wych did not feel as if *she* were developing any hidden stores of docility at present!—not at present ; and one or two new questions, or old ones in a new shape, began to fill her mind ; inserting themselves between the leaves of her Schiller, peeping cunningly out from behind 'reason' and 'instinct' and 'the wings of birds' ; dancing and glimmering and hiding in the firelight. Mr. Falkirk might have noticed, about this time, that Miss Wych was never ready to have the gas lit.

The gas was lit, however, and the tea-tray just brought in, when one evening a few nights after the visit last recorded, Rollo himself was announced. Notwithstanding all Mrs. Coles had prognosticated, he seemed very much like himself both in face and manner ; he came in and talked and took his place at the table, just as he had been used to do at Chickaree. Not even more grave than he had often been there.

It was not the first time Wych Hazel had confessed to herself that tea trays are a great institution; nor the first time she had found shelter behind her occupation. Very demurely she poured out the tea, and listened sedately to the talk between the gentlemen; but it was with extra gravity that she at last put her fingers in. She never could guess afterwards how she had dared.

'Do you think he looks *much* like a ruined man, Mr. Falkirk?' she said, in one of the pauses of their talk.

A flash of lightning quickness and brightness came to her from Rollo's eyes. Mr. Falkirk lifted his dumbly, not knowing how to take the girl. He had not, so far in the talk, touched the subject of Mrs. Coles' communications, though no doubt they had not been out of his mind for one instant. But somehow, Mr. Falkirk had lacked inclination to call his younger coadjutor to account, and probably was hopeless of effecting any supposable good by so doing. Now he stared wonderingly up at Wych Hazel. She was looking straight at him, awaiting an answer; but fully alive to the situation, and a little bit frightened thereat, and with the fun and the confusion both getting into her face in an irresistible way. Mr. Falkirk's face went down again with a grunt, or a growl; it was rather dubious in intent. Rollo's eyes did not waver from their inquisition of Wych Hazel's face. It was getting to be hot work!—Hazel touched her hand bell, and turned away to give orders, and came back to her business; sending Mr. Falkirk a cup of tea that was simply scalding. Her bravery was done for that time.

'What have you been doing this winter?' Mr. Falkirk finally concluded to ask.

'Investing in new stock,' Rollo answered carelessly.

'Don't pay, does it?'

'I think it will. Money is worth what you can get out of it, you know.'

'Pray, if I may ask, what do you expect to get out of it, in this way?'

'Large returns'—said Rollo very calmly.

'I don't see it,' said Mr. Falkirk. 'I hope you do; but I can't.'

'You have not the elements to make a perfect calculation.'

Rollo, it was plain, understood himself, and was in no confusion on the subject. Mr. Falkirk, either in uncertainty or in disgust, declined to pursue it. He finished his tea, and then, perhaps, feeling that he had no right to keep watch over his brother guardian, much to Wych Hazel's discomfiture, he took up his book and marched away.

Rollo left the table and came round then to a seat by her side.

'What have *you* been doing this winter?' he asked, putting the question with his eyes as well as with his words.

'Making old stock pay,'—said the girl, looking down at her folded hands; she was not of the calm sisterhood who hide themselves in crochet.

'Perhaps you will be so good as to enlarge upon that.'

Hazel sent back the first answer that came to her tongue, and the next: it was no part of her plan to have herself in the foreground.

'This is a fair average specimen .of our tea-drinkings,' she said. 'And the mornings are hardly more eventful. Just lately, Mr Falkirk has been a good deal disturbed about you. Or else he was easy about you, and

disturbed about your doings,—he has such a confused way of putting things. But we heard you had copied my "hurricane track,"' said Miss Wych, folding her hands in a new position.

'And were you disturbed about my doings?'

'I? O no. I am never disturbed with what you do to anybody but me.'

Rollo did not choose to pursue that subject. He plunged into another,

'I should like to explain to you some of my doings; and I must go a roundabout way to do it. Miss Hazel, do you read the Bible much?'

'Much?' she said with a sudden look up. 'What do you call "much?"'

He smiled at her. 'Are you in the habit of studying it?'

'As I study other things I do not know?—Not often. Sometimes,' said Wych Hazel, thinking how often she had gone over that same ninety-first Psalm.

'What is your notion of religion?—as to what it means?'

She glanced up at him again, almost wondering for a moment if his wits *were* 'touched.' Then seeing his eyes were undoubtedly sane and grave, set her own wits to work.

'It means,' she answered slowly after a pause, 'to me, different things in different people. All sorts of contradictions, I believe!—In mamma, as they tell of her, it meant everything beautiful, and loving, and loveable, and tender. And it puts Dr. Maryland away off—up in the sky, I think. And it just blinds Prim, so that she cannot comprehend common mortals. And it seems to open Gyda's eyes, so that she *does* under

stand—like mamma. And—I do not know what it means in you, Mr. Rollo!'

'You never saw it in me.'

'No.'

Let me give you a lesson to study,' said he. 'Something I have been studying lately a good deal. I must take this minute before we are interrupted. Have you got a Bible here?'

She sprang up and brought her own from the next room, with a certain quick way if she were excited; Rollo took it and turned over the leaves, then placed it before her open.

'I have heard you read the Bible once. Read now those two verses.'

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."—2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

Wych Hazel read the words slowly, softly,—then look-up at him again.

'Is *that* what it means in you?' she said.

'What do the words imply, for anybody?' he said, with his eyes going down into hers as they did sometimes, like as if they would get at the yet unspoken thoughts. But hers fell again to the book.

'I suppose, they should mean—what they say,' she answered in the same slow fashion. 'But what that is,—or at least would be,—I do not very well know,'

'If One died for me,—if it is because of his love and and death for me that I live at all,—to whom do I properly belong? myself, or him?

'Well, and then?' she said, passing the question as answered.

'*Then* a good many things,' he said, smiling again. 'Suppose that he, to whom I belong, has work that he wants done,—suppose there are people he wants taken care of and helped,—if I love him and if I belong to him, what shall I like to do?'

'What you are doing, I suppose,' said Hazel, with a little undefined twinge that came much nearer jealousy than she guessed.

'That is very plain, and perfectly simple, isn't it?'

'It sounds so.'—And glancing furtively at the bright, clear face, she added to herself Dr. Maryland's old words: 'Love likes her bonds!'—That was plain too.

'Then another question. If *I* belong to this One whom I love, does not all that I have belong to him too?'

'But it was not *I* who said you were ruining yourself,' said the girl in her quick way. 'I liked it.'

'Did you?' said he, with one of his flashes of eye. 'But I am giving you a lesson to study. I am not justifying myself. Answer my question. Does not all I have belong to that One, who loves me and whom I love?'

She bowed her head in assent. Somehow the words hurt her.

'So that, whatever I do, I cannot be said to *give* him anything? It is all his already. I am asking you a business question. I want you to answer just as it appears to you.'

'How can it appear but in one way? said Hazel. 'That must be true, of course.'

'Very well. That is clear. Now suppose further,

that my Lord has left me special directions about what he wants done to these people I spoke of—am I not to take the directions exactly as they stand, without clipping?'

'Yes.'

He put his hand upon the book which lay before her, and turned back the leaves to the third chapter of Luke; there indicated a verse and bade her read again.

'"He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none."'

'What does that mean?' asked Rollo.

'What it says—if it means anything, I suppose.'

Again Rollo put his hand upon the leaves, turning further back still till he reached the book of Isaiah. And then he gave Wych Hazel these words to read:

'Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?'

'How are these commands to be met?' Rollo asked gravely when she had done.

'Why, you have found out!' said Hazel. 'I knew you would go off on a crusade after that October sky, Mr. Rollo.'

He seemed half to forget his subject, or to merge it, in a deep, thoughtful gaze at her for a few moments, over which a smile gradually broke.

'To come back to our lesson,' he said,—'are not these commands to be taken *au pied de la lettre?*'

'They can hardly be the one exception among

commands, I should think,'—with a little arch of her eyebrows.

'Then I am bound, am I not, to undo every heavy burden that I can reach? to loose every bond of wickedness, and to break every yoke, and to remove oppression, in so far as it lies with me to do it? Do you not think so?'

'Why, yes!' said Wych Hazel. 'Does anybody *like* oppression?'

'Does anybody practise it?'

'I do not know, Mr. Rollo. O yes, of course, in some parts of the world. But I mean here. Yes,—those people used to look as if something kept them down,—and I used to think Mr. Morton might help it, I remember.'

'You are not to suppose that oppression is liked for its own sake. That is rarely the case, even in this world. It is for the sake of what it will bring, like other wrong things. But a question more. Can I do *all* I can, without giving and using all I have for it?'

'That is self-evident.'

'Then it only remains, how to use what I have to the best advantage.'

'Well, even Mr. Falkirk admits you are a good business man,' said Hazel, laughing a little.

'How are you for a business woman?'

'Nobody has ever found out. Of course I consider myself capable of anything. But then business never does come into my hands, you know.'

'This business does.'

'Does it? the business of caring for other people?—Last summer Dr. Maryland read a terrible text about the "tears of the oppressed, and they had no comfort-

er." It haunted me for a while. But I could do nothing. No,—one must have more right of way than I have—yet.'

'I do not mean the business simply of caring for other people. I mean the whole course of action, beginning from those first words you read."

'You know,' she said quietly, 'I have never tried.'

'Will you study the lesson I have set you?'

'The one you have been learning?'

'Yes. The one contained in these verses you have read. Shall I do harm if I mark this book?'

'No.'—The word came quick, under breath.

He turned to the different places where she had been reading, and carefully marked the passages; then sought out and likewise marked several others. 'Will you study the lesson out?' he asked as he was busy with the last marking.

'I will try—I think,' she answered slowly. 'As well as I know how.'

'Do not fancy,' he said, smiling as he shut the book, 'that the care of the needy, in any shape, is religion: nor think that He who loves us will take *anything* as a substitute for our whole-hearted love to him. If we give him that, he will let us know in what way we may shew it.'

She made no answer except by another swift look. This was Chaldee to her! He let the silence last a little while.

'Now I have asked you so many questions,' he said, 'I should like it if you would ask me a few.'

'What about?'

'All subjects are open to you!'

'How did you contrive to make the bay "stand"?'

The flash of Rollo's eye came first.

'How do you know I did?' he said laughing. 'But that is no answer. Let me see. I believe, first I made him know that he must mind me; and secondly, I persuaded him into loving me. All that remained, was to let him understand that I wanted him to be immovable when I was not on his back.'

'O, but!—' said Hazel hastily,—the sentence ending in crimson cheeks, and the shyest veil of reserve dropped over her face.

'I might question here,' said Rollo in an amused tone, and eyeing her inquisitively; 'but I have done it so often,—I leave the ground to you. What next?'

'What next' seemed to have flown away.

'Does Collingwood engross all the thoughts that go back to Chickaree?'

A sidelong glance of the brown eyes was all that Mr. Rollo got by that venture.

'How is Trüdchen?' she asked gravely.

'Flourishing. Asks after you whenever she gets a chance.'

'Mrs. Boërresen of course is well, as she has had you to look after?'

'Gyda is happy. It is a comfort to her to have to make fladbrod for two.'

'It must be a comfort to you to eat it!—How is poor Mr. Morton? I felt for him when I heard you had turned his world upside down.'

'What did you feel for him?' said Rollo quite innocently.

'You have asked all your questions. I think it would be proper now,' said Wych Hazel, folding her hands and controlling the curling lips, 'that you should go on

and tell me all there is to be told, and save me the trouble of asking any more.'

'I do not wish to save you the trouble.'

'It is good practice occasionally to do what you do not wish. Instructive. And full of suggestion.'

'Suggestion of what?'

'Try, and you will know. I doubt if you ever did try,' said Wych Hazel.

'I tried it last night and yesterday morning, when I was turned away from your door with the announcement that you were out.'

'But you did not leave your name!' said Hazel, looking up.

'I found it "suggestive" too,' Rollo went on. 'I do not know whether you would like me to tell you all the things which it suggested.'

'How is everybody else at home?' said Hazel, changing her ground. 'I heard Miss May had been sick.'

The answer tarried, for Mr. Falkirk came in, and perhaps Rollo forgot it, or knew that Wych Hazel had; for it was never given. He entered into talk with Mr. Falkirk; and did his part well through the rest of the evening. Then, Mr. Falkirk expressing the surmise, it was hardly put in the form of a hope, that they would see him to breakfast or dinner, Rollo averred that he was going immediately home. He had done his work in town, and could not tarry. No remark from the lady of the house met that. Indeed she had been sitting in the silentest of moods, letting the gentlemen talk; having enough to think of and observe. For absence does change, even an intimate friend, and both lifts and drops a veil. Old characteristics stand out with new clear-

ness ; old graces of mind or manner strike one afresh ; but the old familiarity which once in a sort took possession of all this, is now withdrawn a little,—we stand off and look. And so, secretly, modestly, shyly, Wych Hazel studied her young guardian that night. But when he had risen to go, the faintest little touch from one of her finger tips drew him a step aside.

'I said I would study that,' she began. 'But it seems to me you explained it all as you went along. What is there left to study?'

The grave penetrating eyes she met and had to meet once, gave all the needed force to his answer.—'*Your part*, Miss Hazel.' He stood looking at her a minute ; and then he went away.

If when Rollo had entered the room where she was, that evening, the instant feeling had been that he must come often : perhaps the after feeling was that he could not stand much of this doubtful and neutral intercourse. For he did as he had promised ; left her, practically, to Mr. Falkirk, and came not to town again during all the rest of that winter.

CHAPTER XLII.

STUDY.

IT seemed to Hazel, that in these days there was no end to the thinking she had to do; and if Mr. Rollo had only known, she remarked to herself, he need not have been at the trouble to point out new lines of study. The mere sight of him for two hours had put her head in a tangle that it would take her a month to clear away. Some of the questions indeed had started up under the conversation of Mrs. Coles; but with them now came others, all wrapped round and twisted in; and instead of dreamily watching the fire in her twilight musings, she began now to spend them with her cheek on her book, or her head dropped on her hands, an impatient little sigh now and then bearing witness to the depth of the difficulties in which she was plunged. What was foremost among the subjects of her musings?—perhaps this strange new talk of Mr. Rollo's, with the whole new world of work and interest and consecration which had opened before him. It made her sober,—it brought back the old lonely feelings which of late (since she knew herself to belong to somebody 'in idea') had somewhat passed out of sight. He was beginning a new, glad life; growing wiser and better than she; making himself a blessing, whereas she was only a care.

What could she do for him any more?—would he even want her any more? given up now to these new ways of which she knew nothing, and in which somebody else might suit him better—say Primrose? But at that, Miss Wych started up and stirred the fire energetically, and then came back to her musings.

What did she care, anyhow? She passed that question, turned it round, and took it up in another shape. How would she bear to be all her life under orders? in 'closer' guardianship?—and there the word 'sweeter' flashed in, confusingly. But that was not business. Did she—that is, could she—like him well enough to like to give up her own way? Answer, a prompt negative. Never!—Not if she liked him ten times more than—but it is awkward dealing with unknown quantities: Hazel sheered off. Suppose she *didn't* like it—could she do it? do it so that he would never find out what it cost her? do it to give him pleasure? do it because it was his right? Waiving her own pleasure, pushing aside her own will? Could she do it?—Well, there was not the least hope that she would wish to do it. She should always like her own best: no doubt of that.

Then could she (perhaps) learn such trust in his judgment, as would turn her own will round?—As hopeless as the other. Sometimes, of course, he might be right, —by a great stretch of leniency Miss Wych allowed so far,—sometimes, it was certain, she would. Well: could she give his judgment as well as his will the right of way? For unless she could, Wych Hazel felt quite sure of one thing: she should never be happy a minute in such guardianship. She had not dared to give herself a possible reason for liking it in the old times,—could

she do it, now that she dared? Was she willing to give up, sometimes or always, to just that one person in all the world?—turning her bonds into bracelets, and wearing them royally? And there her thoughts went down to the real bracelet on her arm, and its motto, so suddenly became his:

'In hope of eternal life.'—Would he care for her any more?

O how thoughts tired themselves, toiling round these points! and slowly uprising from them came yet another, which filled the air. What was she to say at the year's end?—or, if *this* were the year's end, what would she say now?—supposing Mr. Rollo still cared what she said. But that last question must be studied by and by. Mr. Rollo would have been amused, may be, and may be a 'ittle touched, if he had known the ogre-like shapes in vhich the girl conjured him up, just to see if she could endure him *so:* putting herself to superhuman tests. But her imagination played tricks, after all; for every Afrite came up with a face and voice before which she yielded, perforce; and even her favourite scene of standing still as the bay and having him snap his fingers for her, ended one day in a laugh, as she thought what she would say if he ever *did*. Then finding she had got very far beyond limits, Hazel coloured furiously and ran away from her thoughts. But they hindered her new study, and interrupted it; and the study brought up the new pain; only slowly through it all, one thing gradually grew clear, helped on by the pain perhaps as much as anything: she would rather belong to somebody than not—if somebody wanted her! And there was only one somebody in the world, of whom that was true.

Whereupon, with characteristic waywardness, Miss

Wych at once gave up her recluse life; accepted invitations, and pulled Mr. Falkirk into a round of outdoor gaiety that nearly turned his head. Trying, perhaps, to test her discoveries, or to get rid of her thoughts; or to prove to herself conclusively that she did *not* wish for any more visits from Chickaree.

And so Wych Hazel knew her own secret.

THE END.

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